Preface

"There is no particular class of photograph that I think is any better than any other class. I'm always and forever looking for the image that has spirit! I don't give a damn how it got made." - *Minor White, date unknown*

With *Artificial Intelligence*, it is now possible to create images for fine art photography or for the purpose of visual communication. It is a new medium with all of the flaws, limitations and potentialities of any new medium. Therefore, if we find cause to criticize it, that does not mean we should not take a good look at it's potentialities and look at it with an open mind.

When photography first came on the scene, it too had many technical limitations in addition to the fact that it was not accepted as an art form. Alfred Stieglitz was instrumental in helping to gain photography's acceptance as fine art and now it is fully recognized as an art medium in its own right.

Art evolved from cave paintings and went through all kinds of art movements and new directions—as has photography. Today, technical changes have greatly affected what photographers can achieve. Photographs cannot be considered as reality—although they probably come a little closer to it than any other medium. But, what about surreal photographs, multiple exposures and photo-shop? We accept them all if they can help us to create an image that is technically good and enables us to evoke the idea or feeling that we wish to evoke in the viewer.

We should look upon the creation of images with artificial intelligence as a tool. We can use it when it is useful—or we can use another tool when it is not. We can learn to understand what it is able to do well and what it is not capable of at the present time. But, rest assured, it will change over time.

In my experiments with it, it has demonstrated that it can do some things that are truly amazing and would be very time consuming or impossible to emulate in any other way. Some images are interesting and closer to what I had previsualized

to what I was seeking than others. Others are not as good technically as I would have liked and required enhancement with photo-shop.

When using *Artificial Intelligence* to create an image, I learned that I am no longer making a photograph but I am functioning more like a picture editor and an art director. My role changed from making a photograph to planning what I wanted the photograph to be and then selecting from the images that had been created. Sometimes, there were surprises and the images were really quite fascinating. It soon became apparent that it is a medium of *serendipidity* or chance.

Sometimes chance produces photographs that can be very interesting and so that is a good thing. In order to be creative, we should expect the unexpected or else we won’t find it. What we arrive at in this way, may be better than what we had consciously planned.

The Photographs

When using the *Creative Image Generator*, it is necessary to plan what type of photograph or art you are looking for. The more specific your directions are, the better. For example, I might write: Create a fine art photograph of a circus setting and make a close-up environmental portrait of a very tall man and a very short man under soft diffused daylight. If I wanted it to be in black and white, it was necessary to write those instructions or else the photograph would be in color. You could use terminology like create a multiple exposure of… Or, create an abstract photograph of a man’s head on a wall that is deteriorating etc..

The waiting time for the image to be created is very short and there was always a selection of several images available for downloading. The

images were created in JPG file format and limited megapixels.

Sometimes the image quality was pretty good but often it required some enhancement with a photo-shop program to improve technical quality such as: cropping, brightness, contrast or re-sizing. In this way, you could turn it into a TIF file if you desired as well.

There may be occasions when it misspells text or creates a visual situation that is not possible or plausible. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware that some images will be acceptable and others will not. If you wish to create a fantasy situation in the photograph, impossible situations are not important but they are important if the situation is supposed to depict a true to life kind of image.

Good photographers are selective and edit their photographs. The photographs that are not selected may be considered as sketches for future ideas. At times, the photograph that happens by chance, can be a very fine and powerful image.

Making images with *Artificial Intelligence* should be made keeping this in mind. The user of the medium should look upon himself or herself as a picture editor and art director who plans, creates, and edits photographs. Since no camera is involved, he or she does not take a photograph but makes them with the tool of *Artificial Intelligence Image Generation*. This person should not take sole credit for the photograph but rather is a human collaborator in their making. Neither the person involved or the process of *Artificial Intelligence* is the sole creatorof the image. Skill with the handling of a camera and photographic lighting is not as important as a knowledge of photography, lighting and photographic aesthetics in order to make such photographs.

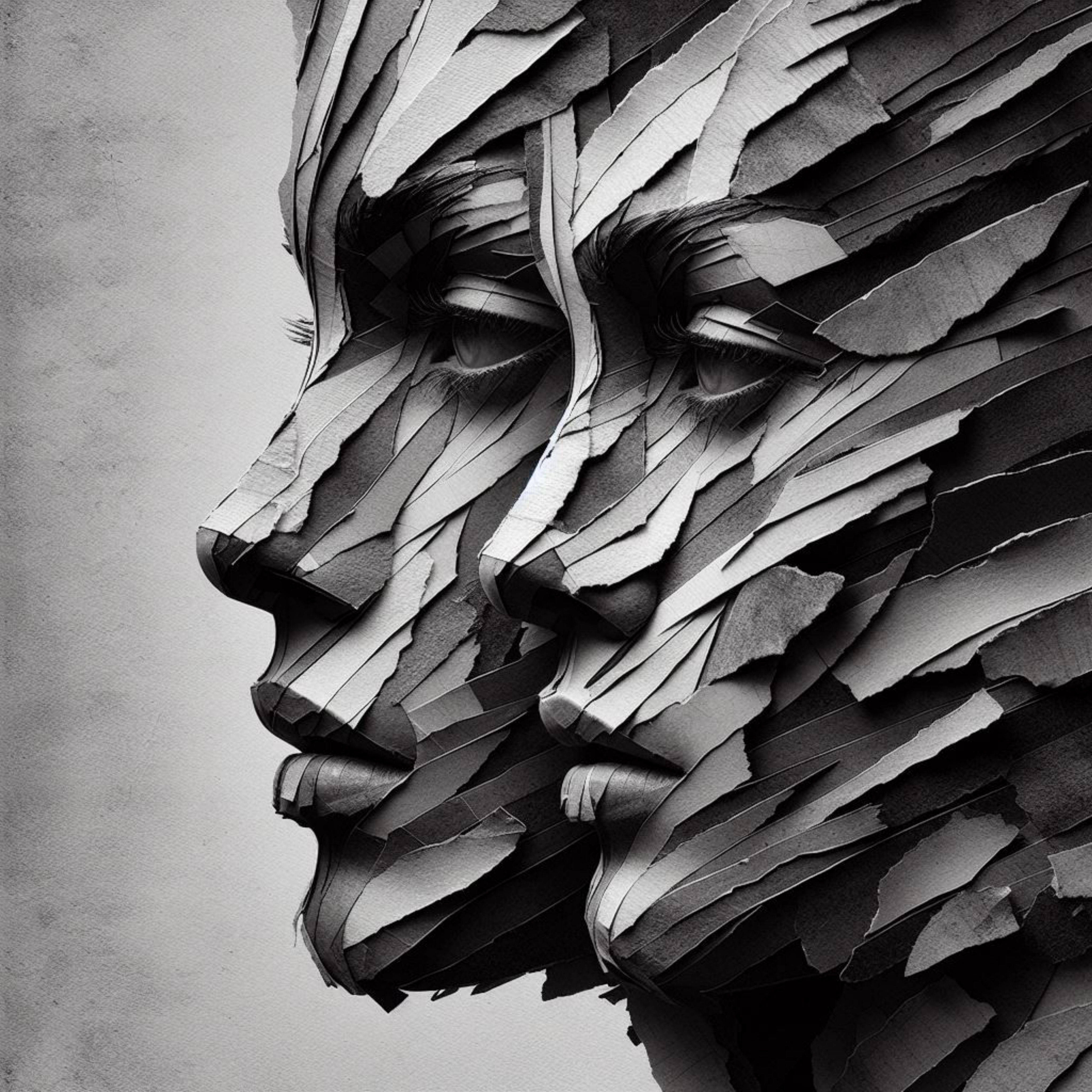
Photographs made by *Artificial Intelligence* may not be intended by the human maker of the image at all. On the other hand, the photograph may have been created with symbols and objects that reveal the intent of the picture's maker very well. Nevertheless, the photograph will cause associations within the viewer to occur. Therefore, a valid "reading" of the photographs as to what it may communicate or what ideas or emotional feelings it may evoke is still possible. Whether the creator of a picture is a photographer, an artist, or a user of *Artificial Intelligence Image Creation*, it is important to "read" the image in order to insure that it will convey to the viewer the idea, feeling or emotion that the maker of the image intends it to convey. This can be accomplished by using visual symbols that the viewer will be able to understand and by using a title that will guide the viewer's associations in a particular direction.









































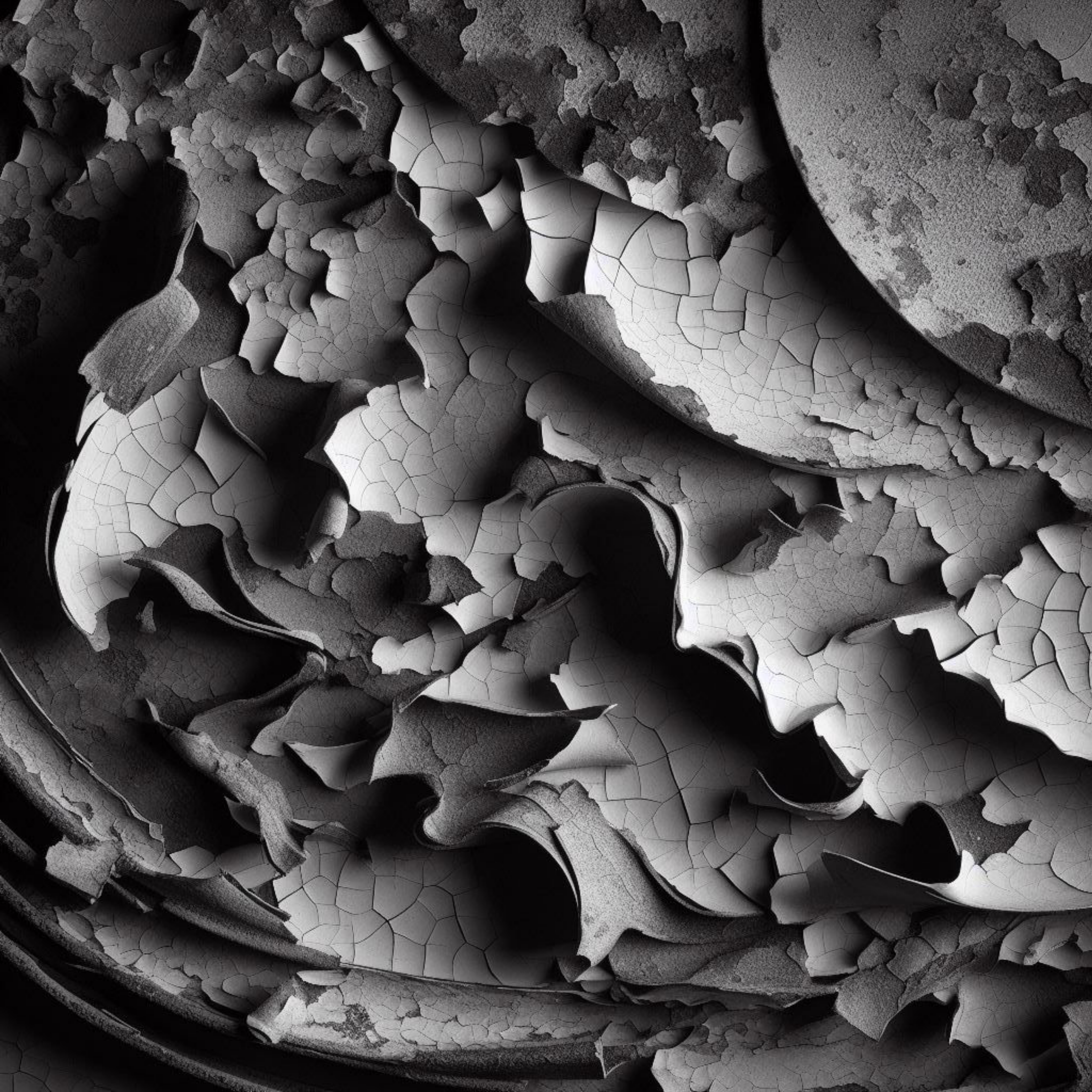














































































































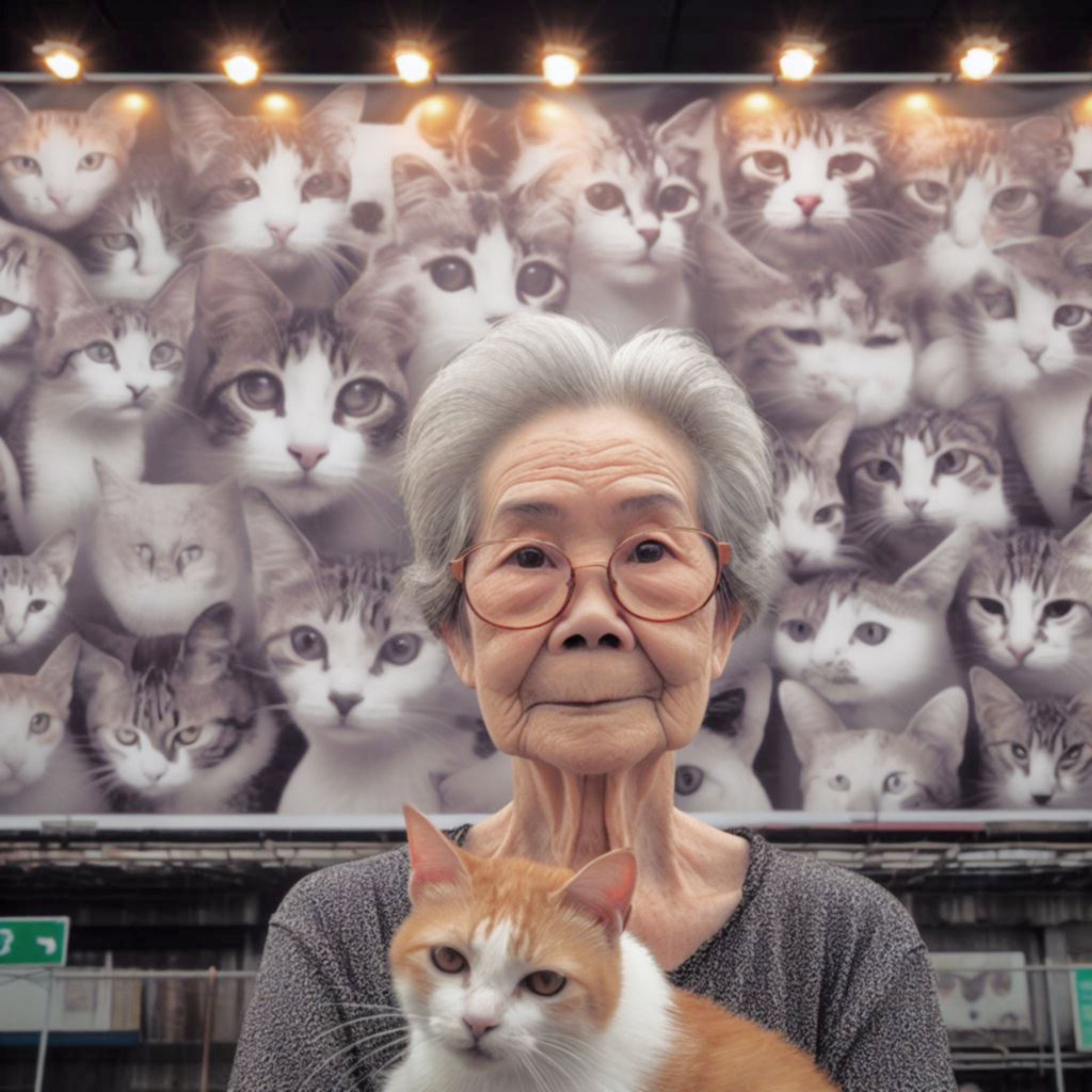


























































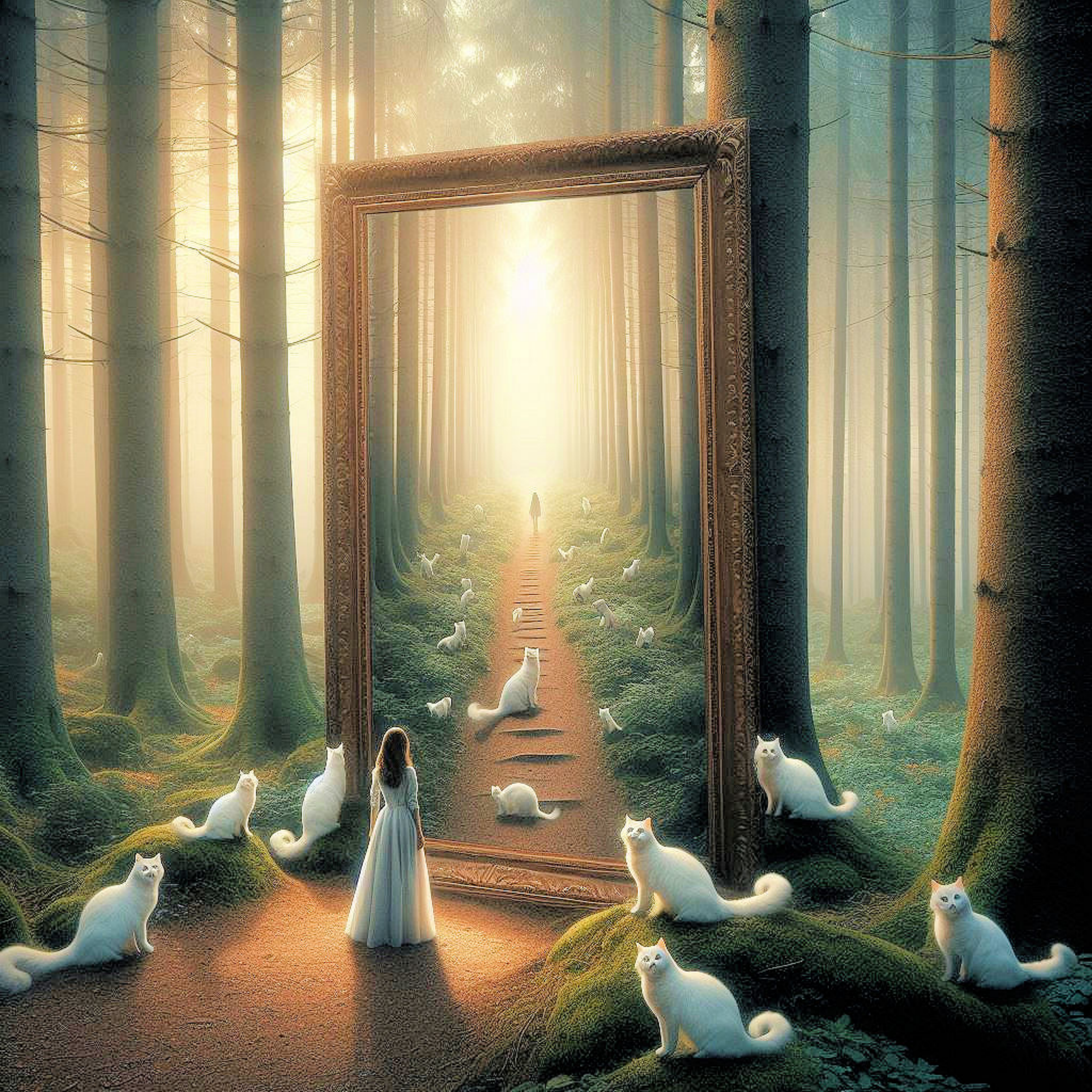







































































































JAZZ


JAZZ
JAZZ
231











































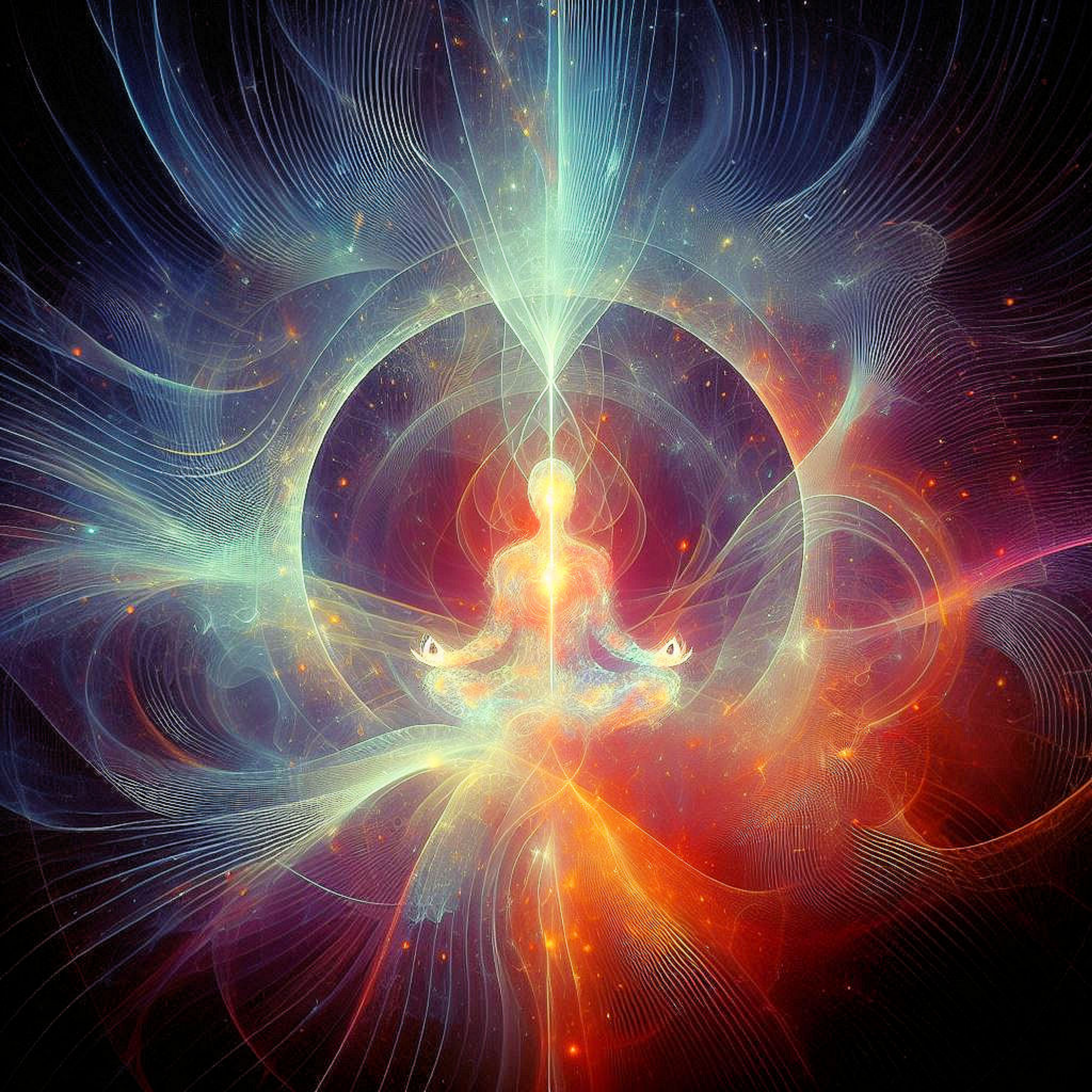


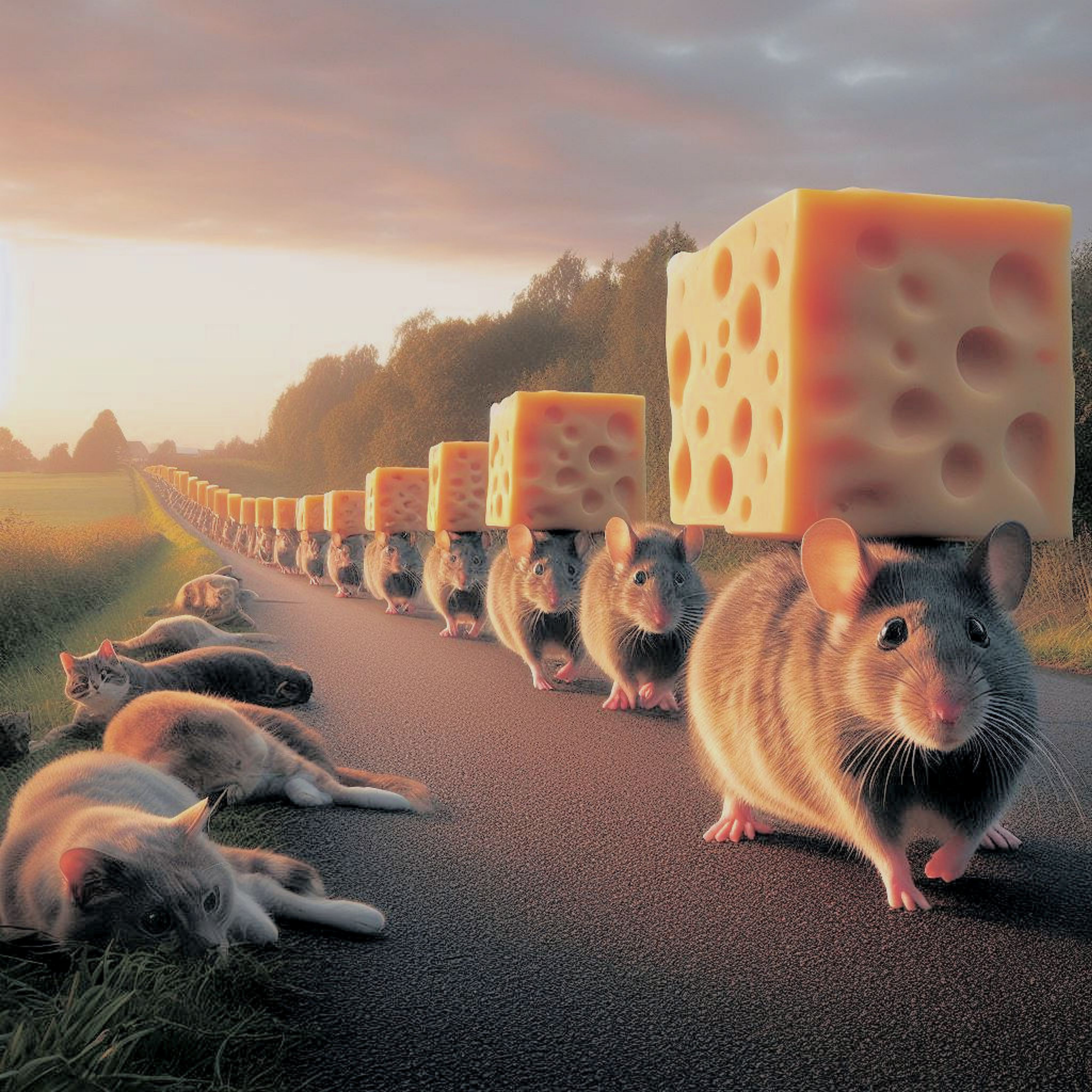






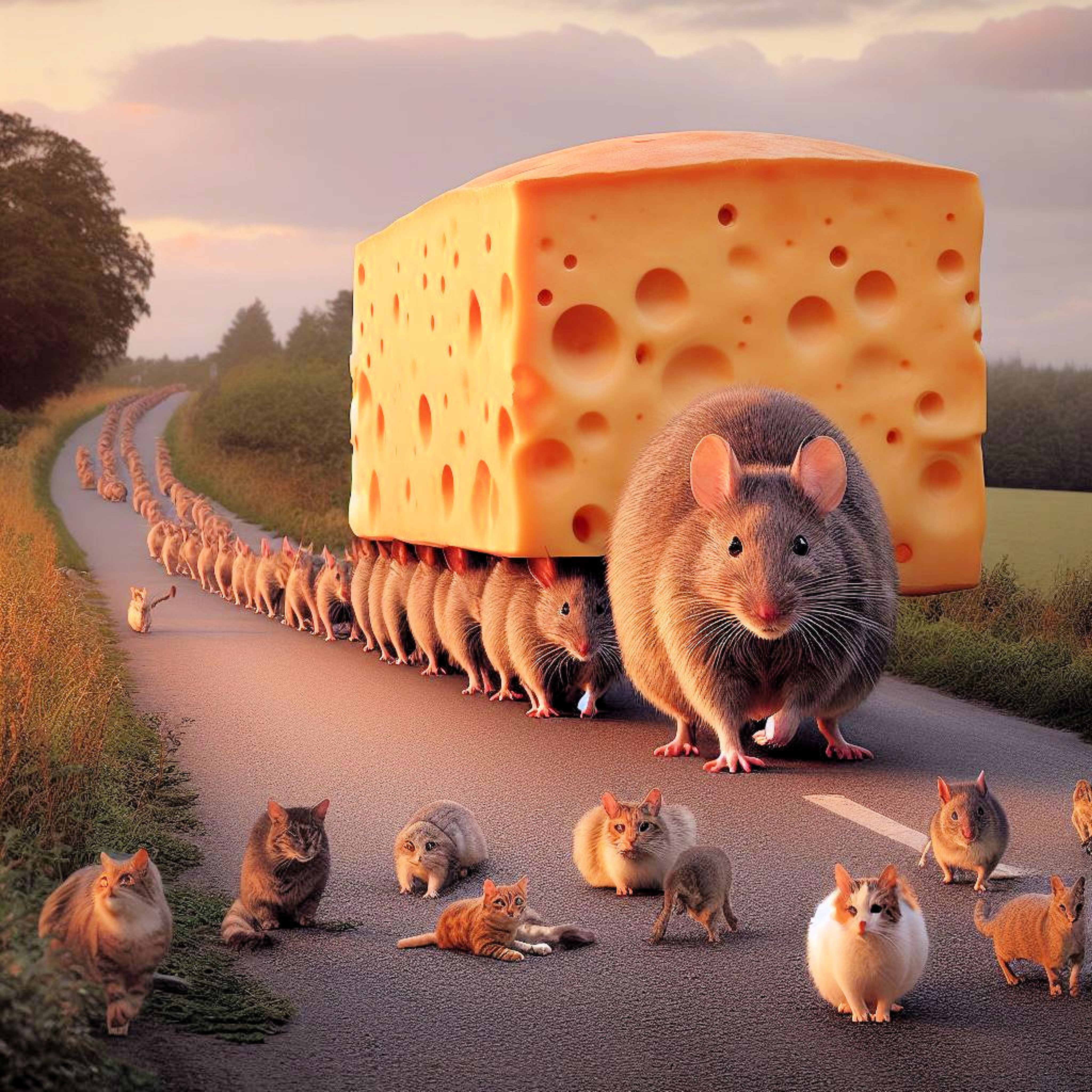
















































































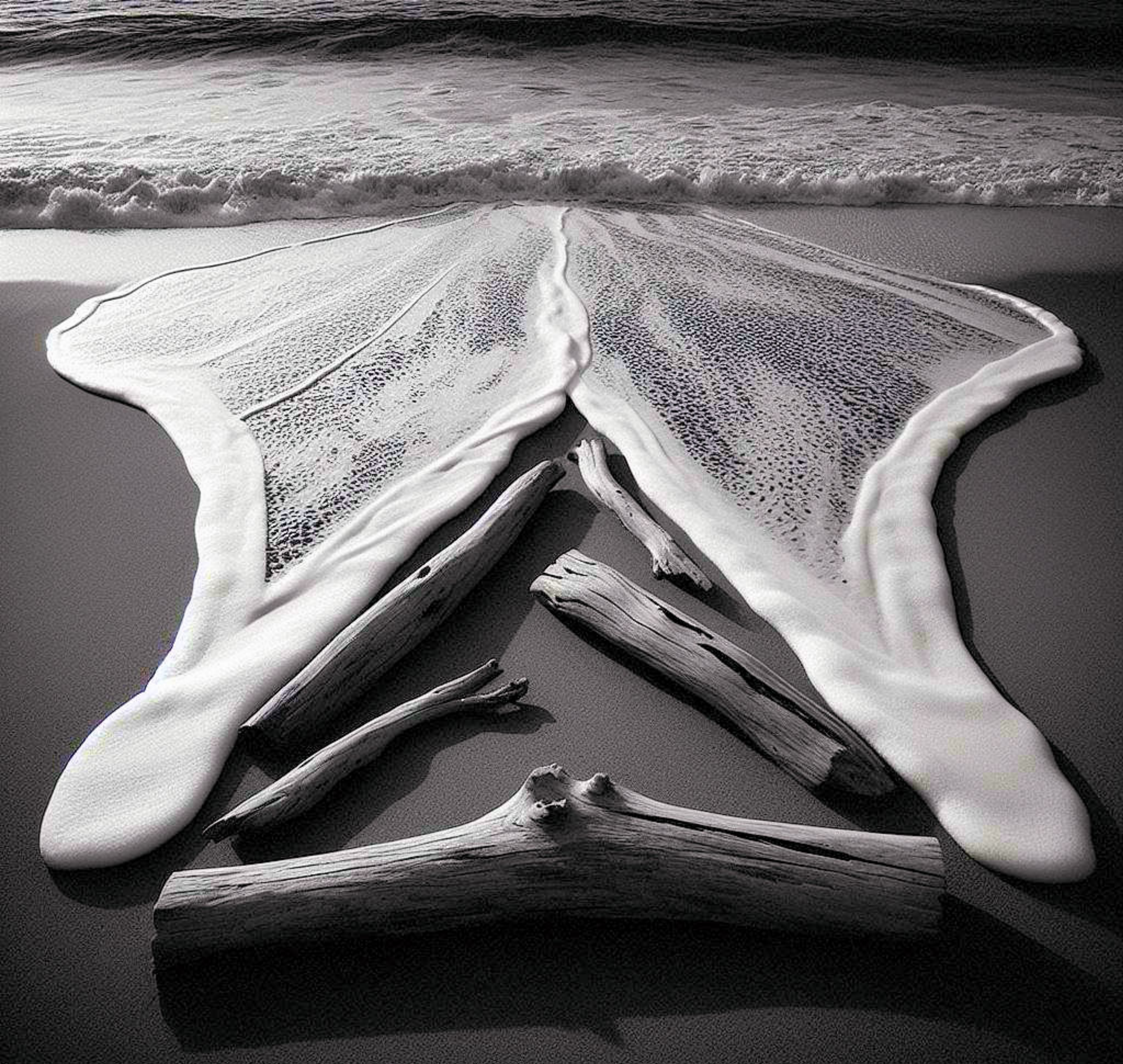















































































666


666

















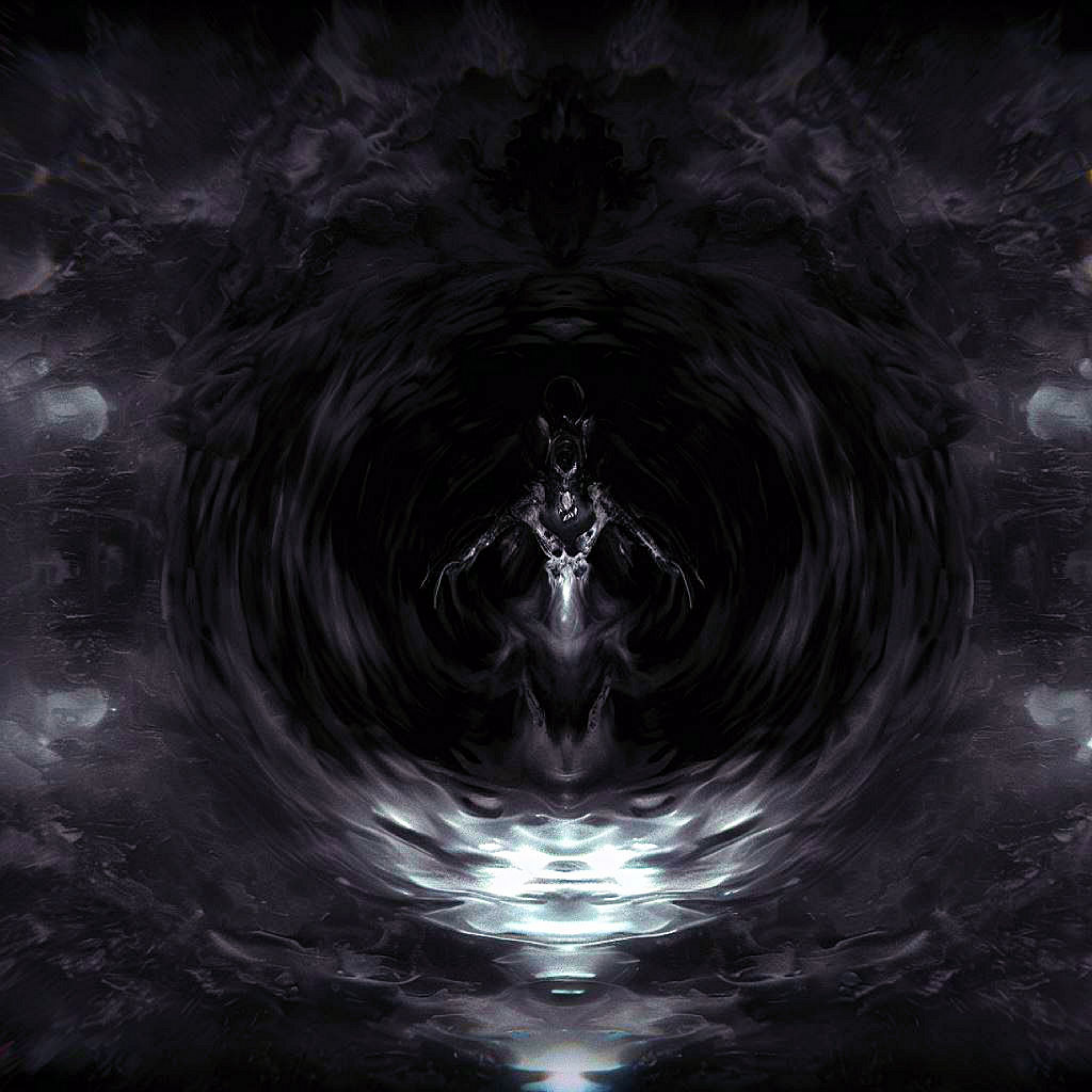



























































POLICE


POLICE




























33







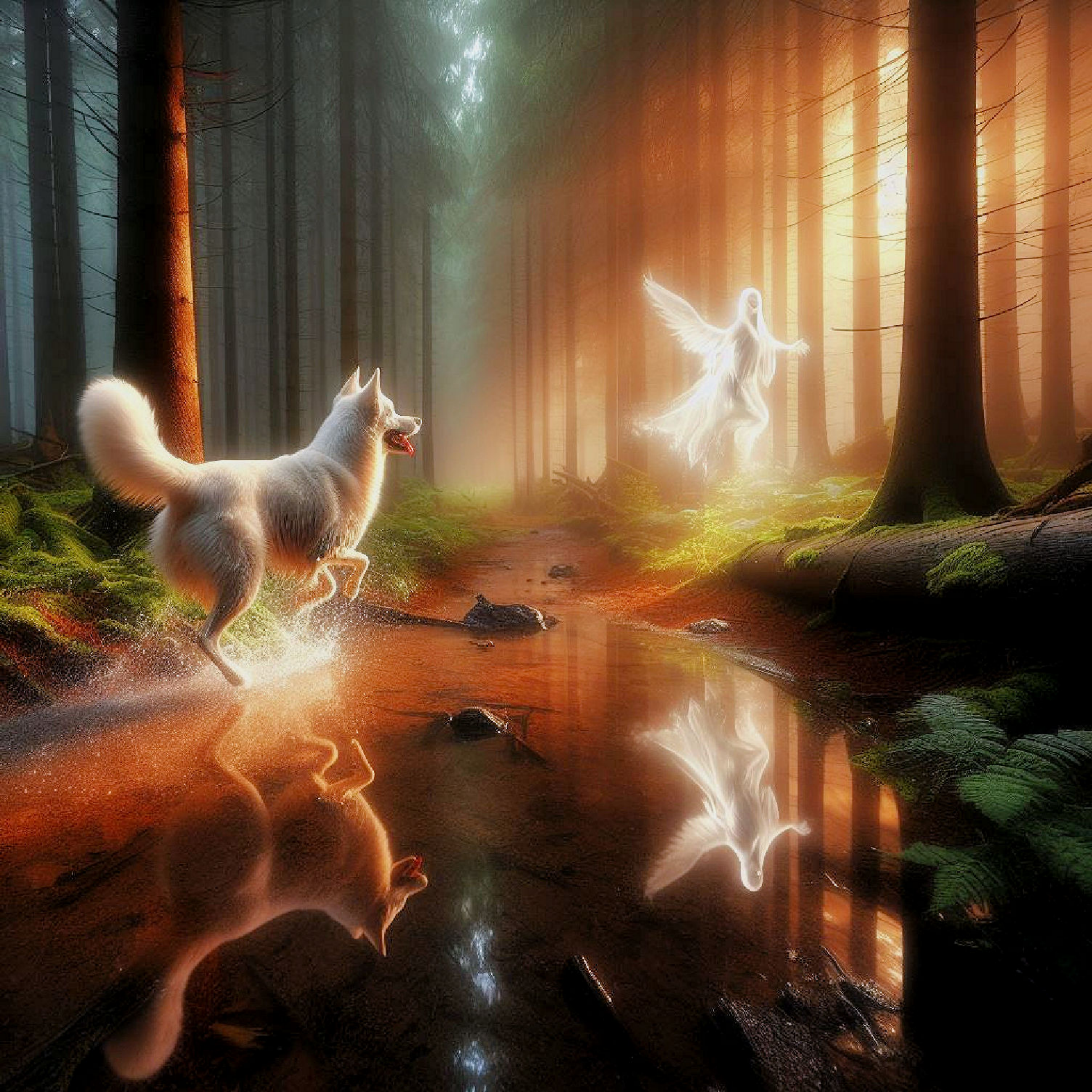

22





































































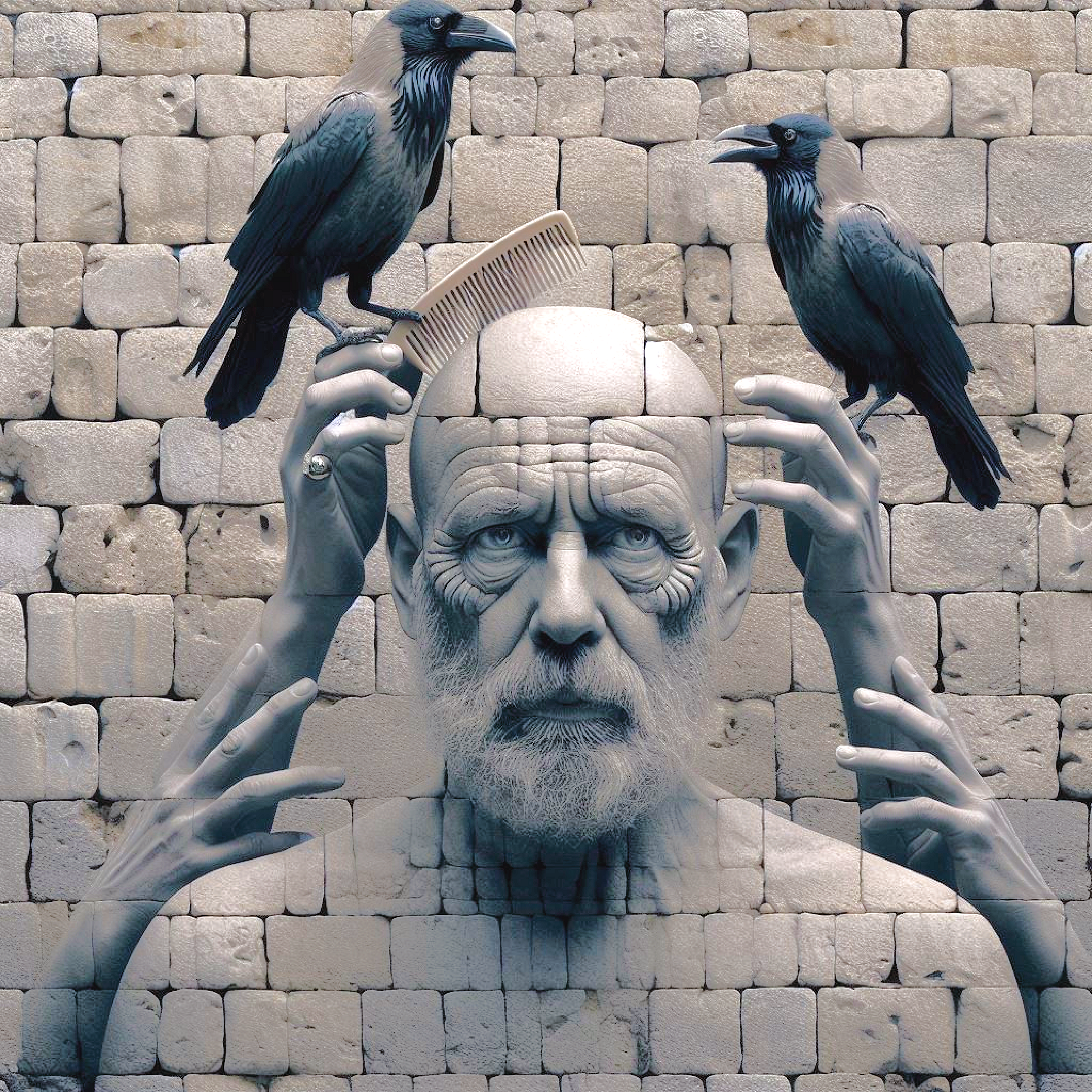

















































MOZART













Artificial Intelligence & Photography Appendix

In the Appendix, I would like to illustrate how even photographs created by Artificial Intelligence can take a theme and illustrate it. The following photographs were created in order to show crows responding to music and the resulting photographs are how Artificial Intelligence interpreted the idea in various ways. This will be followed by a series of photographs on the theme: Faces On A Wall.

Finally, I would like to add a copy of my ebook: *A Beginner's Guide To Pictures* so that you may have a source book that will help you to better understand the photographs in this paper.











Faces On A Wall
A Photographic Series



















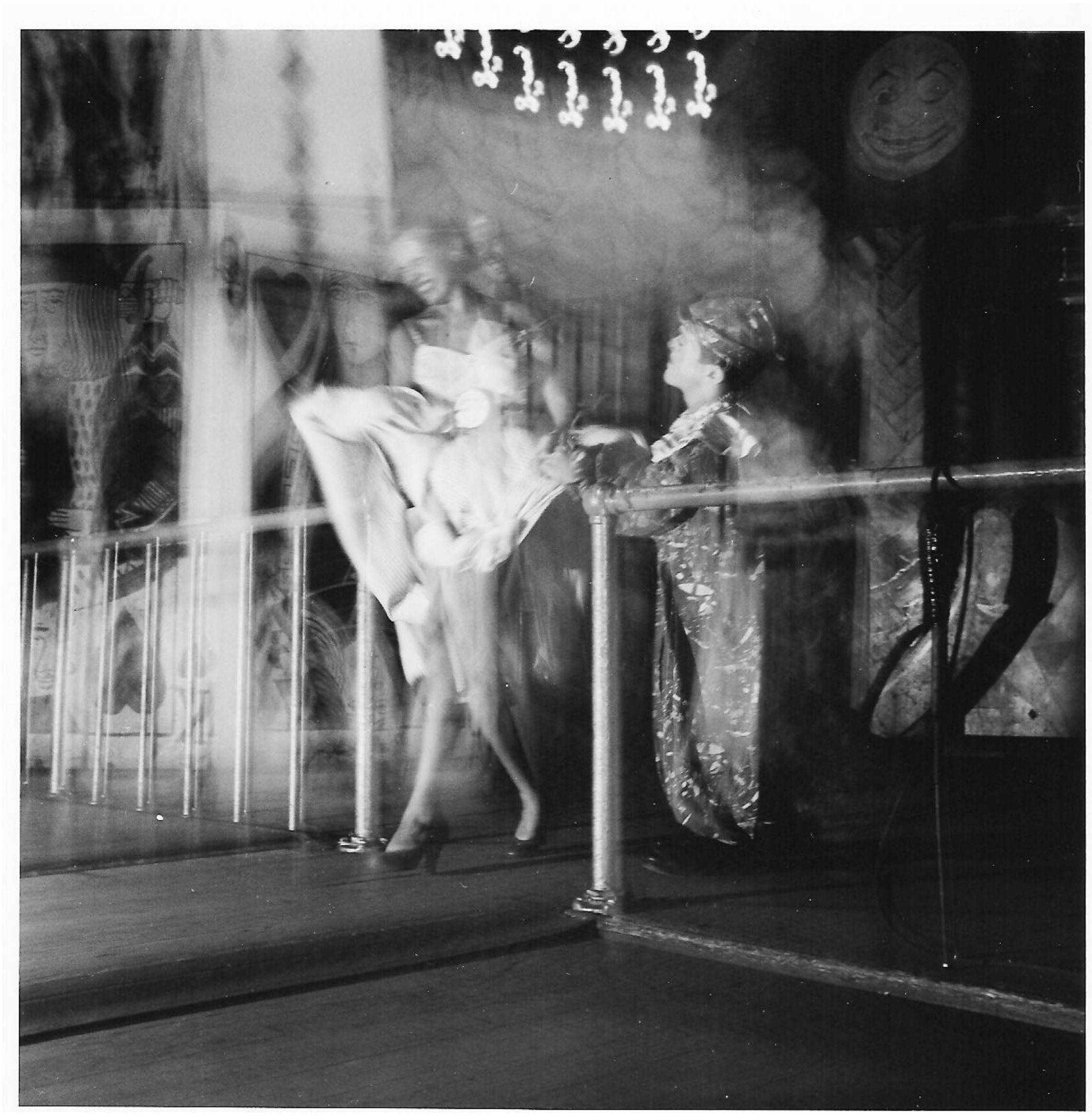








A Beginner's Guide To Pictures



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PICTURES

BY

ISIS VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

COPYRIGHT © 1999 by Stuart A. Oring

Revised 2010

ISIS Visual Communications

Stuart A. Oring
2570 Redbud Lane Owings, Maryland 20736

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

While this book has been written from the perspective of fine art photography, the theories, concepts, and procedures that it describes apply to other forms of visual art as well. If these methods are used correctly, they will enable you to look at pictures with a greater degree of insight and understanding than is otherwise possible.

At the present time, we find ourselves with a large body of knowledge related to the understanding of pictures. This information has come to us from a wide variety of disciplines. But, each approach to the understanding of pictures has certain strengths and weaknesses. And, each individual approach can only reveal a limited amount of the information that a picture might express. Furthermore, some of these procedures for analyzing and interpreting pictures are of little value because they serve only to bring forth memories and associations that are projected from our unconscious mind. Often, these memories or associations have little or nothing to do with what a picture may actually express visually.

Many people believe that a picture can cause a variety of responses and does not have a single predictable meaning. Perhaps this seems to be true because there are many different ways that a viewer can misinterpret what a picture might express due to intellectual and emotional factors, the ambiguity of some images, projection, the mind set of the viewer, differences in the life experiences of people, various blocks to understanding, or simply the inability of some people to understand how to read or interpret an image. Furthermore, we often overlook the fact that we pick up more from unconsciously scanning art than we are consciously aware of. Therefore, it is very important that we should tap into our unconscious mind for additional information and insights at some point during the process of trying to understand a picture.

It is my hope that this book will help to lead you in the direction of a comprehensive model for understanding pictures that will include:

- A logical and rational analysis of what you are consciously aware of in a picture

- A passive contemplative meditation of the picture in order to help you become aware of what your feelings about the picture might be

- A study of the picture’s design motifs and what they might suggest

- The use of biographical, historical, religious, philosophical, socio-logical, cultural, and psychological information whenever it seems to be appropriate to your understanding of a picture

- A study of the symbols in a picture – which includes the use of good symbol dictionaries as reference tools – in order to help you select the most appropriate meaning of symbols according to the context in which they have been used

- The use of methods that will help you to tap into your subconscious mind in order to reveal information and insights that you would have been unaware of otherwise

- A determination as to whether or not your feelings about what the picture expresses is supported by its form, content, and symbols

- A correlation of the data to help you to better understand a visual image and to reveal areas of conflict (and possible errors) in your analysis of a picture

It is possible to enjoy pictures without understanding them because we can allow art to cause enjoyable associations to arise within us – or we can use it to take us back to pleasant experiences in our past. But, if we fail to understand the feelings and ideas that are actually expressed in a work of art, we will never enjoy art to the fullest extent possible.

The comprehensive approach to art requires desire, time, and effort on the part of the viewer. So, it is natural to ask the question: Why should we spend this amount of time and effort in order to understand a picture? Perhaps the answer lies in the following analogy.

Interpreting a picture can be compared to solving a jigsaw puzzle. If the complete puzzle represents everything that a picture expresses, then each piece of the puzzle might stand for some part of the whole. For example, some pieces could represent segments of some intellectual idea – or some emotional or kinesthetic feeling. Other pieces of the puzzle could stand for the meaning of various design motifs – such as line, color, tonality, space, texture, shape, and balance. And, still other pieces could represent the various symbols in a picture and what they might signify – or important biographical, historical, sociological, or religious facts relevant to the life of the artist. Finally, we must remember that a work of art contains a great amount of visual information that we may not be aware of – but which may lie buried in our unconscious mind. If the puzzle is somehow to be solved, and if we are to understand a picture as well as can be expected, then it is necessary to put as many of the pieces together as possible. But, on the other hand, if our approach to reading pictures can only provide us with a limited amount of information about a picture, then our understanding of the picture will be limited as well.

We should look at images in multi-faceted ways. There are various levels of understanding images. At the First Level, things are recognized for what they are. At the Second Level, we try to realize the emotions felt. At the Third Level, we analyze the social, historical, and political arena. Where does the picture fit into the history of photography? Does it echo other photographers? At the Fourth Level, we undertake Freudian and Jungian exploration of psychological analysis. Here we see faces, symbols, and "play audience" until the act is over. At the Fifth Level, we discover what we can regarding the photographer. And, at the Sixth Level, we let the photograph speak to us while we are in passive concentration.

Associations

Although making and remembering our associations is a vital part of the process of understanding pictures, we mistakenly believe that our associations will lead us to a complete and accurate understanding of a picture. Some approaches to understanding pictures suggest that the viewer make note of any associations that might come to mind while engaging in methods that encourage free association to take place (such as meditation or "clustering"). But, it is not enough to create associations and to make note of them. Somehow, we must also tie-in these associations to the form, content, and symbols of a picture – or else we are in danger of misinterpreting pictures because our associations may be projections from our own unconscious. Associations can also be tied-in to memories from our past or they may be derived from various other causes that have more to do with ourselves than with the picture itself.

If free association allows us to uncover and explore areas that we might otherwise overlook when looking at pictures, then how can we let the free association process go free and what do we do with it afterwards? How do you decide? The answer may lie in looking at our associations as possibilities and not as absolute certainties.

There are a number of different ways that our associations may come into existence. They may come about naturally or we may create them. But, regardless of how they may come about, they are both helpful and necessary. If our associations are to possess validity, however, they must contain strong ties to the image itself. The question is: Which associations possess the strongest ties to the image – and why?

Associations play a significant part in picture analysis and interpretation. But, there are many other important aspects to reading a picture as well. In this book, we will investigate what the different components of reading a picture are, how they relate to one another, and how we can apply various procedures in order to look at pictures in a more insightful way

Memorable Quotations

“When An Urgency Is Present,
It seems To Find Many Mirrors Of Itself In The Visual World.”

“Images Can Be A Record Of An Inner State
That The Photographer Neither Remembers Seeing Nor Experiencing
At The Moment Of Exposure.”

The Image Can Be Seen To Mean Different Things To Us At Different Times –
And Since We Project Our Feelings
We Say That The Photograph Changes Its Meaning.”

“The Photographer, Instead Of Photographing That Which Is,
Can Photograph That Which He Himself Is.”

“Photographs Work As Equivalents With Certain People At Certain Times.
The Same Photograph Shown To Another Person
May Or May Not Function As An Equivalent.”

“Dreams And Photographs Have Something In Common,
Those Photographs That Yield To Contemplation
At Least Have A Quality About Them That Tempt
One To Set Associations Going.”

“What You Will Find Will Be Your Own.
The Experience Cannot Be Compared To Addition
Because That Implies One Right Answer And Many Wrong Ones.
Instead The Experience Should Be Compared To An Equation
One Factor Of Which Is The Viewer’s State Of Mind.
When So Treated There Are As Many Right Answers
As Persons Who Contemplate The Picture;
And Only One Wrong Answer – No Experience.”

“Let Associations Rise Like A Flock Of Birds From A Field.
What Do Various Parts Of The Photograph Remind You Of – Visually?
What Does The Picture As A Whole Suggest Again Visually?”

“If A Photograph Is Gazed At In Silence, Wordless Silence,
Until Intuitive Understanding Flashes –
An Inner State Of Awareness Is Reached.
In Zen It Is Called Koan. When The Koan Is Resolved,
It Is Realized To Be A Simple And Clear Statement
Made From The State Of Consciousness Which It Has Helped To Waken.”

"Reading Photographs Is The Visual (Non-Verbal) Understanding
Of The Relationships Within A Photograph.
And, It Is The Understanding Of The Relations Between Two Or More Images.
Understanding On Any Level; Subject Matter, Design, Psychology, Technique –
May Lead To Vision.
Reading Photographs At A Verbal Level Becomes A Translation
From Visual To Verbal, With All The Problem That Translations
From One Language To Another Entail.
In This Case, The Translation Is From Photography To Literature."

"...All Photographs Are Self Portraits."

"Very Often I try To Find Something That Matches A Feeling I Have.
On The Other Hand, A Lot Of Times I Photograph With Nothing Specific In Mind.
I Just Play It As It Comes.
If It's Good, Fine.
I Find 'Letting It Happen' Relaxing, A Playful Vacation.
Stimulating Pictures Almost Always Result."

"The Unexpected Image Was The Record Of An Inner State
That I Did Not Remember Seeing And Did Not Remember Experiencing
At The Moment Of Exposure."

"When I Looked At Things For What They Are I Was Fool Enough To Persist
In My Folly And Found That Each Photograph Was A Mirror Of My Self."

"A Sequence Of Photographs Is Like A Cinema Of Stills.
The Time And Space Between Photographs Is Filled By The Beholder,
First Of All From Himself, Then From What He Can Read
In The Implications Of Design, The Suggestions Springing From Treatment,
And Any Symbolism That Might Grow From Within The Subject Itself."

"At First Glance A Photograph Can Inform Us.
At Second Glance It Can Reach Us."

"Photography Is A Language More Universal Than Words."

Minor White

"Photography, used as a fine art, is what any artist makes of it. For the analytical artist, photography is a tool to record his visual curiosity, his visual understanding, and his visual contemplation of the world. For the objective artist, photography can reveal the meanings of things and render surfaces with love and beauty. The subjective artist can use photography as a means of self-expression – simply by dissociating the subject from its connotations. When photography is used in this manner, the unconscious mind can be reached through the reading of the photograph's design. Discarding the connotations of subjects leaves them symbols that can be read like dreams. The world of the unconscious mind is turned into the raw material of art."

Minor White. "What is Photography?," Photo Notes, (Spring, 1950).

"The photographic image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. The photographer can put things into the subconscious and get a visual answer in time – if he works in a seeing state with a blank and responsive mind, and if something is fed into the subconscious mind through meditation. Sometimes the relationship between what has been fed into the subconscious can be seen instantly, sometimes only after the print is seen in meditation.

The photographer's task is to make emotional feelings come out visually. The process by which this occurs can be called: The Unconscious Creative Cycle. First, an idea feeling becomes isolated and drops into the subconscious from the surface mind. The photographer's mind is thus sensitized, and found objects or objects in the studio develop into an idea when put together. Next, there is a visual echo of the idea feeling. The photographer recognizes that something exciting has happened, but he may or may not know the cause. The photograph may be the result of contemplation and pre-visualization; or it can be created very quickly, as a result of the photographer's recognition that something of importance has taken place. Finally, the new photograph is contemplated and the idea feeling is identified. The conscious and unconscious are united by feeling, which leads to their fusion in a spontaneous public image or photograph."

Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communication, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958; and Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960).

"…It is only after I have put down an equivalent of what has moved me that I can even begin to think about its meaning. I have to have experienced something that moves me and is beginning to take form within me, before I can see what are called 'shapes.' Shapes, as such, mean nothing to me unless I happen to be feeling something within, of which an equivalent appears in outer form."

Quotation from Alfred Stieglitz appearing in Dorothy Norman's book Introduction to an American Seer, New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1960.

"With the **Essence Image**, the photographer tries to work from the intuitive or sensed reality of the subject. The attitude of the photographer is to find the wonder and revelation of a subject through the direct experience of the thing for what it is."

Minor White. "Conscious Photography" (Unpublished Treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968).

"To reach essence, the photographer cannot work as the painter does. The photographer cannot pile up characteristics until an essence is synthesized. He must wait until a face, gesture, or place goes 'transparent' and thereby reveals the essence underneath. This exact instant, when the subject bares its inner core is a transitory and fleeting moment. It is never repeated exactly. The expressive function of the camera is to make photographs that reveal the essence of the subject along with the facts."

Minor White. "Photography is an Art," Design XLIX, 4 (December, 1947).

"…The photographer's power lies in his ability to recreate his subject in terms of its basic reality and to present this re-creation in such a form that the spectator feels that he is seeing not just a symbol for the object but the thing itself revealed for the first time."

Edward Weston. "What is Photographic Beauty?" <u>American Photography</u>, XLV, 12 (December1951).

"In Weston's photographs, the texture, the physical quality of things is rendered with the utmost exactness: the rough is rough, the smooth is smooth, flesh is alive, stone is hard. The things have a definite proportion and weight, and are placed at a clearly defined distance one from another. In one word, the beauty which these photographs of Weston's possess is photographic beauty!"

Nancy Newhall. <u>The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico</u>, Vol. I, <u>The Daybooks of Edward Weston</u>. (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1961).

"The aim is to capture the beauty not merely of appearance but of the spirit; it is inner beauty manifesting itself outwards. It is the beauty of the innermost nature of things, the beauty of hidden truth….The foremost principle in art lies in a successful rendering of the spirit each object has. There would be no need for talking about principles of painting, if painting were no more than an art of copying the shape. The ultimate aim of painting is to represent the spirit of the object.

Makoto Ueda. <u>Literary and Art Theories in Japan</u>. Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1967.

Some Things That Pictures Can Do

- A picture may stir up an audience.
- A picture may symbolize a state of mind.
- A picture may relate to surrealism.
- A picture may not be realistic. It may be abstract and emphasize the typical qualities of the subject.
- A picture may reveal things in a new and different way. New ways of seeing things are some of the biggest uses of the camera.

And, do not overlook the "mental fiendishness" of the photographer. The photographer may be trying to surprise or shock you. If you "draw a blank," it is sometimes helpful to relate pictures to other experiences. Remember, however, that you may not be the audience for a particular picture.

When you look at a picture, it may be helpful to assume that it is a studio set-up and that everything in it, inch by inch, tone-by-tone was planned. Or, if it is candid, that when the photographer saw it – he recognized it. Study everything that the photographer did and then ask yourself why the photographer did it.

It also helps to classify a picture into one of several categories. A picture may show "reality," in which case it may be "documentary" or "photo-journalistic." Or, a picture may be a record of the photographer's "inner state" experienced at the time of exposure. So, the photographer instead of photographing "that which is," can instead photograph "that which he himself is." On the other hand, the photographer is able to show how he feels about the subject or he can show the essence of the subject and its "inner qualities." Things are shown for what they are. As the audience, we have to go out of ourselves and out of our way to understand the object, its fact and essence.

It is necessary to understand that an object can have more than one essential quality or essence. A rock can be both hard and mysterious. One cloud can be soft and lyrical – another, dynamic and threatening.

Everyone perceives differently. What the photographer feels to be the essential qualities of the subject, may or may not be the same as what others perceive to be its essence. A photograph may be an answer to either a visual or psychological problem that the photographer has been working on for a long time. Or, it may be a sketch for future understanding and study.

Introduction

We live in a world surrounded by pictures – and yet most people know very little about pictures or how to understand them. If you feel frustrated or discouraged when you look at pictures because you cannot understand them, then this is written especially for you.

A good deal of information has been written on the subject of “how to look at pictures” – but some of it is worthless and much of it is far too complicated for most people to understand. Even information that may be helpful lies scattered about in many different subject areas – such as art, photography, psychology, and theories about perception. To make matters worse, very few magazines or books that are published about art or photography tell us what it is that pictures might express – or what the artist or photographer may have had in mind. Instead, we are usually given lengthy descriptions about art history, art theory, and the artist’s life and style. However, it is equally important for us to have an awareness of the ideas or feelings that are expressed in a picture – and how this has been accomplished.

Understanding pictures will never be simple. But, “the visual language” can be learned – just as any other language can be learned. Although you will be able to get some enjoyment from pictures without knowing very much about them, you will enjoy them a great deal more if you are willing to put in a little time and effort – in order to explore some very important things about them, such as:

- Design Motifs In Art And What They Mean
- The Role Of Symbols And How To Understand Them
- The Psychology Of Perception
- The Psychology Of Creating And Viewing Art
- The Function Of The Unconscious In Art

But, before you go ahead and take the first step of your journey, there is something else that you should know. Some pictures are more difficult to understand than others. If you should find that you cannot understand a particular picture, then perhaps you are trying to understand a picture that is simply too difficult for you at this particular time. If that is the case, then you should put the picture aside for now and return to it later when you understand pictures a little bit better.

To make “looking at pictures” fun, always select pictures to look at that are interesting to you. And, try “reading” pictures with friends who also enjoy pictures and what they might mean.

After you are able to put these principles into practice, and find that you are able to look at pictures with some degree of understanding, try exploring the books and articles on “the recommended reading list.” While some of these publications are currently out of print, most of them should still be available through inter-library loan.

The Different Kinds Of Pictures

There are several different kinds of pictures. In order to understand a picture, you will need to know what kind of a picture you are looking at and what its purpose may be.

- Informational Pictures inform the mind. Pictures, which explain, instruct, or report belong to this classification. Reading such a picture depends a great deal on having a specialized knowledge of the subject.

- Documentary Pictures act as a bridge to experience, taking the viewer to the original event, place, or time. The photographer or artist attempts to report – yet leave himself or herself out.

- Pictorial Pictures can show us some essential quality of the subject or how the artist or photographer saw the subject and felt about it. Generally, the pictorialist is less concerned with recording the subject than the picture it will yield. These pictures reveal how the artist or photographer sees and everything in the picture contributes something to the total meaning of the picture.

- The Equivalent is a picture that stands for a feeling that the creative artist has had about something. The subject of the picture acts as a metaphor of that feeling. “Feeling” refers here to the creative artist’s notion of the inner nature of the subject. In the Equivalent, no attempt is made to imitate the outer features of the original subject.

Occasionally, pictures can transcend categories. Informational and Documentary pictures can be aesthetic.

A picture can portray subject matter literally as we would normally expect to see it – or non-literally where the subject matter (or reality) is changed in some way. Literal pictures can show us people, objects, and their relationships, as we would normally expect to see them. Non-literal pictures make changes in the subject matter to show us "Things For What Else They Are." These pictures involve changes in lighting, texture, tonality, and space. The actual subject matter serves as a symbol for some idea or feeling of the artist. Ice, for example, may not represent frozen water – but it might symbolize a state of immobility instead.

If the image is realistic or documentary, ask yourself: What reality about the subject does it show? What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

A picture can reveal the essence of the subject, how the artist feels about the subject, an idea or feeling that the creative artist has – or some inner state of mind. In order to understand pictures, we should try to understand why the artist created the picture in the first place. Ask yourself: Does the picture reveal some essential quality of the subject? If so, what is the essential quality that you feel? Or, do you feel as though the artist has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject? If so, why? If the picture works as an Equivalent, try to understand what feeling or idea it might express. If the picture portrays an inner state of mind, try to understand what state of mind it portrays.

A Passive Approach

In order to begin, it is helpful to try to understand what your overall response to the picture might be. And, remember, your response to the picture may or may not be what the artist intended to express – or what the picture might actually express. Begin by asking yourself:

1. What does the image suggest to me?
2. Does it have human or animal-like qualities?
3. What feelings do I get from the image?

In order to get in touch with your feelings about a picture, it will be necessary to be still with yourself and to contemplate the picture for a period of time. Passive and silent contact with an image is at least as valuable as active contact, perhaps more so. It is only by being still with ourselves, that we can make ourselves receptive to the suggestions coming from the images that well up into the conscious mind from the subconscious.

Work “in contact” with the image and sustain the awareness simply by listening in utter silence and stillness for the image to speak. This is a special form of “listening” that is directly connected with seeing. It is felt by some to be a “listening with the eyes.” So, keep out the usual sounds and maintain a space of silence. Be patient and relax. When the image speaks, it will do so in your own language. Passivity – letting it happen – is different than actively forcing contact. At times, the passive approach will be the only way to reach the meaning of an image. By being still you can make yourself voluntarily receptive to the suggestions coming from the image.

One of the first signs that contact with the image is about to take place is that the perception of space within the image will suddenly increase. Other changes that may be experienced in the image include an increase of overall brightness or a change in size.

The image should be scanned until everything in the picture has been seen and noted – including all of the relationships in the picture. When everything has been observed, let whatever associations flow that the image may cause to arise within you. The associations that flow up in you while looking at the image seem to originate in the image itself, but actually the associations originate in yourself. Ambivalent images and the associations that flow while looking at such images transform pictures into a self-mirror. In order to discern whether our impressions and associations are expressed by the image – or whether they originate within ourselves – it is necessary to decide whether or not they are supported by the form, content, and symbols of the picture.

Activity is not the only way to work in a state of stillness with an image or to remain sensitive to the suggestions that the image may provide. You will derive similar rewards if you remain passive. Sit in stillness, waiting, waiting patiently, without anxiety, waiting in readiness to receive suggestions and impressions. Sooner or later the image will “speak” to you if you “listen” with the eyes in wordless silence.

The Orientals have a simple approach to understanding pictures. Oriental Literature says to sit with a picture, as one would before a sage, patiently waiting for a few “words of wisdom.” Some westerners know this too. Some have put images they are trying to understand in out of the way corners of the house. In such locations, the eye will catch them unawares – and see the images in a different light. In other words, the more habitual ways of seeing images are tricked away and one sees briefly without the usual associations. In this way, one sees the image in all of its unfamiliar beauty – and without our personal projections.

Working in this state of passive recall, one can see without trying to see, the strange beauty of a photograph or the wonder of the commonplace. Later, the image can be recalled and the experience continued – or one can interact awarefully with the image in an entirely new way. The recall period, like the original contact period, is subject to all kinds of influences – including our associations.

Take a final impression and then write down your observation about the experience. What did you become aware of concerning the image that you were not aware of before? Did the image change in some way?

An Active Approach

Basically, in The Active Approach," we explain what the artist or photographer was trying to say – and how he or she used each visible component toward that end. The active work of experiencing a photograph consists in "scanning" the image until everything in the photograph has been seen and noted. The spectator should become acquainted with each object and with every detail within the photograph as well as with the relationships between objects and the space they inhabit. When all of the relationships in the photograph have been observed, the viewer should bring his technical knowledge and philosophies about the medium to bear on the image. The viewer analyzes composition with the surface mind; with intuition he feels the relation of composition to the picture content. The spectator can establish empathy with the image by using his imagination to mentally "project" himself into the various objects within the photograph.

At the end of the work period, the state of stillness is turned off in brief steps. A final impression of the image should be taken before looking elsewhere. Then, the experience should be held on to in silence. The various things, which have been seen and noted, should be reviewed as related visuals.

The more questions you can find to ask of a picture and the more detailed answers you work out for the questions, the better you will read the picture. But, don't accept just any answer to your questions. Examine them very carefully. Reading a picture becomes a process of discovering its purpose and discovering the various means the artist used to achieve that purpose. In order to do this, you will need to ask such questions as:

- Why are there three people in the picture and not two?
- Why was the picture cropped in this particular way?
- Why does the picture show the subject from a low angle?
- Why is the picture dark and gloomy?
- Why does the lighting seem right for the picture?
- Why are the shadows disturbing?
- Why has a rather confusing setting been used?

In order to understand pictures, it is very important to be extremely aware of what you see in the picture. It is helpful if you describe and write down everything that you are aware of. No detail should be overlooked because it may be important to your understanding of a picture.

Next, ask yourself questions about the picture such as:

- What is the subject of the picture?
- What action takes place in the picture?
- What person or object receives the action in the picture?
- What is the setting where the action takes place?
- What do the various tonal areas suggest to you?
- What do the light areas suggest?
- What do the dark areas suggest?
- What do the middle tone areas suggest?
- What do the tonal areas suggest when viewed together?
- What does the use of space in the picture suggest?
- What does the lighting suggest?

In writing and speaking, words serve as verbal symbols for what we may wish to express or communicate. In visual communication, such as painting or photography, visual symbols express feelings and ideas according to their relationship with the various parts of a picture. Symbols play a very important role in either form of communication and there are some things that you will need to know about them.

The various elements of design in a picture function as symbols. And, every design motif can have a variety of “symbolic meanings” according to the subject matter of the picture. These design motifs include: tonality, space, line, color, texture, shape, and form etc. For example, horizontal lines may suggest rest, diagonal lines may suggest motion, dark tones appear gloomy, light tones might suggest joy and so on. If you do not understand the elements of design, you will be greatly handicapped when you try to understand pictures, because you will have to rely on your emotional reaction to these design elements alone.

Another kind of symbol that we need to be concerned about is “The Object Symbol.” Objects often have symbolic meanings in pictures – and there can be psychological meanings, mythological meanings, cultural meanings, or archetypal meanings. (Basically, archetypal symbols are symbols that are shared by various cultures from the present time to the very distant past.)

One should look at a picture for what is actually there – and for what it says – not for the effects that were used and how they were achieved. When and how a photograph was created has nothing to do with the essential life of the picture. People, who speculate too much about the technical aspects of a photograph, never see the picture itself. It is best to respond to photographs for the feelings that are expressed within them – or the spirit that they possess.

In order to understand pictures, it is necessary to decide what symbols may be present in a picture, what the symbols might mean, and how they relate to the rest of the picture. If a picture portrays subject matter objectively, there may not be any “object symbols” in the picture that we will need to try to understand – although even in this kind of a picture – design motifs, space, lighting, and tonality etc. have symbolic meanings that serve to influence how we feel about the image. However, if a picture is subjective and portrays the ideas or feelings of the artist, we will need to try to understand what the various “object symbols” in the picture might signify as well.

We use a dictionary to look up “the best meaning” of a word – according to how that word has been used in a sentence. Likewise, it may be necessary to look up the meaning of a visual symbol in a good symbol dictionary to help us decide what the best meaning of a symbol may be in a picture – according to the context in which that symbol has been used. Symbols can have many different meanings and it is not possible to rely only upon your personal feelings and associations as to what a symbol might signify. The actual meaning of a symbol will depend upon the subject content of the picture and the symbol’s relationship to the various parts of the picture. If a symbol’s meaning does not make sense according to the context in which it is used in the picture, then it will be necessary to select another meaning for that symbol.

Having decided what emotional feelings and associations the picture causes within you, ask yourself: Do these feelings or associations match the symbolic meaning of the picture? And, Do my feelings about the picture agree with those I get from the design motifs (including the feelings of space, lighting, and tonality)? If the answers to both of these questions are “yes,” then you are probably on the right track. If not, then your feelings about the picture are probably wrong and you have probably misconstrued what the picture may mean.

Your feelings about a picture should be derived from the form, content, and symbols of the image. They should never be tied-in to associations that are projected from your subconscious – if these associations are a self-mirror of yourself.

Allow some time to pass by and then look at the picture again. After some time has passed you will see the picture differently than you did before and you can expect that you will discover many things in it that you did not notice previously.

Try not to become discouraged if you cannot understand a picture at first. Some pictures are more difficult to understand than others. And, understanding pictures requires some effort, patience, and time. If the parts of a picture are pushed around often enough and long enough our subconscious mind will help us work out the solution.

Procedure For The Analysis Of Photographs

At first, one should feel the emotional significance of a photograph and then use intellectual analysis to bear out or disprove those feelings. To look at a photograph with a predisposed mind, may blind us to what the photograph says. This method of print analysis is based on the contemplation of visible relationships, as well as intellectual and emotional meanings. All of the visible occurrences in a photograph (or painting) can be analyzed for what they are.

The various concepts, such as light quality and space, have a bearing on the mood of a picture as well as a profound effect on the meaning of the picture. Although many concepts and elements overlap and combine to establish the mood of a picture, they can be isolated in order to describe their functional effect on the picture. For example, if we can disassociate in our minds the light that occurs in a print from the subject of the print, the light itself can be felt to have an effect on the total mood.

Concepts are useful only if they help us get at the significance of a photograph or painting. The important thing is to identify the “idea-feeling” of the photographer (or artist) and to understand what it is that the artist is saying.
If the picture is emotionally a blank, deliberate analysis of the various concepts may help us to understand the picture’s significance.

Any picture that communicates does so because a person is reading it. The process of reading a picture can be an intellectual effort, an intuitive one, or a combination of both. To make “a reading,” verbalization is necessary. One has to speak or write about one’s experience of a photograph or painting. In the process of translating a visual experience into verbal expression, slips are bound to occur and so verbalizing should be done only after the picture is experienced – and it should be done only if there is sufficient reason.

Reading a photograph or painting may be based on what it reminds you of. It is a “verbalization” of your experience of a picture. The process of “reading a photograph” converts a non-verbal experience into a verbal one. Non-verbal communication does not involve the spoken word. It may be conscious or unconscious. It may be made by gestures or through the meaning of objects themselves. It may use signs and symbolism.

A picture must be read without criticism. When we dislike a picture, we immediately “shut off” any further communication. When we like a picture, we are pleased to carry on a relationship with it through an interchange of visual and verbal symbols. Once evaluation is suspended, we can concentrate on the significance of the picture.

The critic must withhold judgment long enough to find what is going on in the picture. Analysis may be used in order to keep the conscious mind busy so that the intuitive side of the man can go to work. Often, the critic will bring an entire system of analysis to bear in order to free the intuitive forces within himself. He keeps his attention fixed on the visuals of a picture without losing sight of the significance.

It is important to decide whether the photograph is “documentary,” “pictorial,” “informational,” or some other kind of photograph. There are appropriate methods for experiencing each type of photograph. The “Informational Photograph” can be read for the information it contains in a special field, and it can be read pictorially if we bypass information and observe its aesthetic qualities. In the case of the “Pictorial Photograph,” we isolate those associations, which seem to pertain to the photograph. The graphics, the design, and all the other visual concepts, are the means to tell another person about the photograph’s pertinent associations.

Readings of photo-journalistic work should usually be done in the light of the subject, and how the photographer has used the subject matter. The reason for reading a photograph is that it enables us to understand “what is going on in the photograph” technique-wise and communication-wise.

It is generally believed that a picture can cause a great many different associations to rise up within us and that they are all equally valid. But, we should only look upon these associations as possibilities – which may or may not be meaningful. Associations that cannot be tied-in to the form, content, and symbols of the picture may not be pertinent. They may only be projections from our own subconscious.

We pick up more from the unconscious scanning of a picture than we may be consciously aware of – and we do so more efficiently. While pictures contain a great deal of information that we are consciously aware of, they also contain a considerable amount of information that lies below our conscious level in the subconscious. Therefore, when studying pictures, it is important to study not only what we are consciously aware of – but to tap our subconscious for information as well. No detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant, should be overlooked because it may be important to the meaning of a picture.

A thorough analysis should include: a logical-rational analysis of what we are consciously aware of in the picture; a determination as to whether or not our feelings about the picture are actually supported by the form, content, and symbols; a study of the picture's design elements; the use of methods that will enable us to tap into our unconscious; and a correlation of the data.

Characteristics Of The Experience

What you "find" in a photograph will be your own. There is not only one right answer and many wrong ones. There are as many right answers as there are persons who contemplate a photograph. And, the only wrong answer is no experience at all. Whether the more active or more passive method is used, the result of the contemplation is to be experience. This may happen through "a flame burst of understanding," or it may occur after a picture has been lived with for some period of time.

A picture may be "engaged" casually by the subconscious mind for weeks or months before it is set up as a target for intense concentration. During this time, the unconscious mind engages the picture in its own way and all of the various things that are present in the picture provide a rich feast for the subconscious mind. (We may project human qualities into the picture, parts of the subject may suggest faces or other parts of the human anatomy, or other associations may be set into motion within us.)

No one can predict what a person will experience when reading a photograph. The experience must be accepted for what it is. Moreover, once the surface meaning of a photograph is identified, it takes concentration and discipline to carry out a reading.

Many people see themselves in photographs, and most of us see what we wish to see, or anything else except what is actually present. Projection and empathy lead us to see something of ourselves almost automatically in anything that we look at long enough to be aware of. The photograph, therefore, invariably functions as a mirror of at least some part of the spectator. Many persons, looking at a photograph, see something of themselves before they see anything else. Some degree of mirroring happens with any photograph, but it is especially strong with the "non-literal" or stylized photograph. Mirroring is also strong in photographs where the presence of design is equal to or stronger than the sense of the presence of the subject in front of the camera. When subject matter is rendered in an obscure or ambiguous fashion, we invent a subject for it. What we invent is derived from ourselves, and the photograph then becomes a mirror of some part of ourselves.

Recommended Reading

Barrett, Terry. Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images. Mountainview, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1996.

_______. Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary. Mountainview, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994.

Brooke, James T. A Viewer's Guide to Looking At Photographs. Wilmette, Illinois: The Aurelian Press, 1977.

Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. A Dictionary of Symbols. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basic Blackwell, Inc., 1944.

Chiarenza, Carl. Interaction: Verbal/Visual. Portland, Oregon: Nazraeli press, 2006.

Cirlot, J.E. A Dictionary of Symbols. New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1971.

Cooper, J.C. An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1993.

Feldman, Edmund B. Varieties of Visual Experience. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Gassan, Arnold. "A Notebook Resume of the Workshop in Photography (Summer, 1962), Conducted by Minor White in Denver, Colorado." Unpublished MS in the archive of the Center For Creative Photography, University of Arizona, (Typescript.)

Hall, James. Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974.

______, Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1994.

Hattersley, Ralph. "How to Read a Photograph," Popular Photography, XLII, 3 (March, 1958), 54-104.

______. "Photo-Symbolism" Popular Photography, LXIV, 3 (March, 1969), 69-72.

Oring, Stuart A. Understanding Pictures – theories, exercises, and procedures. Owings, Maryland: Isis Visual Communications, 1992.

______. "Stieglitz, Weston, Adams, White – Experiencing the Photograph," Photographic Business And Product News, (May, 1974), 46-47, 58, 60, 64-66.

Roberts, Helene F., ed. (1998). Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography. (1st ed., Vols. 1-2). Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

Watkins, C. Law. The Language of Design. Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1946.

White, Minor. "What Is Meant By Reading Photographs," Aperture, V, 2 (1957), 48-50.

_______. "A Psychological Explanation of Contemplation," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 58-61.

_______. "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," Aperture, X, 3 (1962), 116-28.

_______. "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," Ways of Growth, eds. Herbert A. Otto and John Mann. New York: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1968.

_______. "Analysis of Five Prints," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels. New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951.

_______. and Walter Chappell. "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," Aperture, V, 4 (1957), 156-71.

Let us now take a photograph and analyze it as comprehensively as possible. To do this, we must try to understand our emotional feelings about the photograph – and we will need to determine if our feelings about the image are justified by carrying out a logical-rational analysis of the picture.

Preliminary Statement About The Photograph

Some inner urgency caused the photographer to create the forms that brought this photograph into existence. He felt some kind of an inner excitement and then made the photograph. If you push the parts of the photograph around long enough, and follow the suggestions that have been given to you in this “guide,” something should take place and the image will suggest possible meanings to you. Write down what your experiences with the image are, and then compare your write-up with the example analysis that follows.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Appendix A
(Example Of An Analysis Of A Photograph)

What is the overall feeling that you get from the picture?

Passing through a gateway back to reality from an emotionally unpleasant and absurd situation

Does it have human or animal-like shapes or qualities?

Yes, it has human-like shapes and qualities – but it has other shapes and qualities as well (i.e. ghost-like figures, a clown's head, a heart shape).

What are the implied relationships in the picture?

What do they suggest?

The girl's expression shows a difficult situation that caused anguish.

The man watching the girl and standing nearby suggests a guide.

The opening in the barrier or fence suggests a gateway from one area to another.

The blurred light areas suggest unreality.

The ghost-like heads suggest ghosts from the past.

The heart shape, near the girl, suggest human emotions.

What are the various feelings that you get from the picture?

The Lighting makes you feel:

Theatre-like make believe

The Tonality makes you feel:

Mystery

The Space in the picture makes you feel:

Contrast between reality and unreality

Touch/Tactile Sensations make you feel:

The suggestion of objects but not the essence of skin, cloth, or metal etc.

Motion/Kinesthetic Sensations make you feel:

Motion or exiting someplace

Design/Composition Sensations make you feel:

The movement of people and life-like fantasy shapes

What do the light, middle tone, and dark areas each suggest?

The light tones suggest unreality – the dark tones suggest a feeling of mystery. The middle tones in front of the girl suggest reality.

What do they suggest when viewed together?

A feeling of movement from a mysterious and unreal situation back to reality.

Now relax, be still with yourself. Contemplate and meditate on the picture for at least 10 minutes.

What impressions about the picture do you get from meditation?

Unreality, fantasy, ghost-like images, anguish, and guidance

List what you see in the picture.

The blurred image of a tall young lady

The lady is exiting an area that suggests a "fun house."

A short, guide-like man is watching and assisting her.

A dark curtain is in the background.

There are hidden ghost-like shapes, the cutout shape of a clown's head, and a heart-like shape.

What is the subject of the picture?

The young lady

What action takes place?

The lady is walking away from a fantasy-like area.

What person or object receives the action?

A fantasy-like area with a guide-like person

Describe the setting where the action takes place.

- Large blurred cards
- Several face-like shapes
- Repetitive abstract shapes
- A dark and fantasy-like area with a guide
- A railing that separates the fantasy-like area from reality

If the picture is realistic or documentary, what reality about the subject does it show?

What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

The picture is not documentary. Instead, it seems to express the photographer's idea or feeling about the subject's relationship to her environment. There are many symbols in the picture that need to be interpreted before the image can be understood.

If the subject material is not easily identifiable, the subject seems to suggest:

An “Alice in Wonderland” fantasy-like quality

The action seems to suggest:

Leaving an area where fantasy is experienced

The object or person acted upon seems to suggest:

The subject has felt anguish or pain because of the experience.

The setting seems to suggest:

Unreality

Write one or more paragraphs that describe in detail what happens in the picture.

A tall, young lady is exiting a fenced area that seems unreal and appears to have caused her anguish and pain. A guide is assisting her through the fantasy area and she is now passing through a gateway back to reality. There are repetitive light shapes, blurred face-like forms that suggest ghosts, and a dark mysterious curtain in the background.

List the symbols and possible metaphors that you see in the picture – and then write down the associations or meanings that these symbols and possible metaphors have for you according to how they are used in the picture.

The winking, round, clown-like face and greater than life sized cards suggest absurdity and unreality.

The blurred light areas and the blurred face of the girl suggest movement towards reality.

The girl’s expression suggests an emotional situation that has caused pain or anguish.

Leaving a fenced area suggests leaving an area of demarcation.

The closed curtain suggests separation.

A guide-like man suggests a need for guidance.

Ghost-like faces suggest ghosts from the past.

A heart-shape form suggests that human emotions are involved.

Take the paragraph(s) that you wrote, describing the picture, and re-write the paragraph(s) using the symbolic meanings of the various symbols and metaphors that are in the picture wherever it is appropriate to do so.

A tall, young lady has been in a fantasy-like situation (the environment) that has caused her anguish or pain (her expression and the heart-like shape). The situation was absurd (the clown-like face) and ghosts of that situation still haunt her (ghost-like figures). Some separation was involved (the mysterious curtain). But, with guidance, she was able to leave or exit the situation.

How do these symbols and/or metaphors influence one another to affect the meaning of the picture?

The setting of a fantasy-like place suggests unreality.

An emotional situation is suggested by the lady's expression.

The fence suggests a demarcation of two distinct areas.

The background curtain symbolizes separation.

There is a guide or custodian present to provide assistance.

A clown-like face on the curtain could symbolize absurdity.

The heart shape suggests that human emotions are involved.

What do you think the artist or photographer was trying to say?

When we are in a situation that causes emotional anguish we may need guidance.

How did he or she use each visible part of the picture to help say it?

Blurred Images

Over-sized Cards

A paper cutout face with a face-like form to the left

The blurred face of a young lady expressing emotion

A guide-like figure located next to the lady

A metal fence, which seems to separate the areas of fantasy and reality

What is the mood of the picture?

Anguish caused by an “unreal” situation

How did the artist or photographer establish this mood?

The symbolic meaning of the various objects in the picture

The relationship of the people and objects in the picture to one another

The emotional feelings that the tonalities suggest

The spatial relationships in the photograph

What are the artist’s or photographer’s ideas and attitudes towards the subject?

Fantasy and reality need to be clearly separated.

Guidance can be helpful in an emotional situation.

What tricks were used to get the artist’s or photographer’s ideas across?

What alternatives could the artist or photographer have used to express the same idea or feeling?

This photograph is realistic but a surrealistic style could have been used to express the same idea. By doing so, however, the situation portrayed in the picture would appear to be less real and true to life than it seems to be here. And, it would seem to be more of a fantasy than actual reality.

Does the picture reveal the essence of the subject? If so, what essential qualities does it show?

There is a state of mind expressed rather than the essence of the subject.

Do you feel as though the artist or photographer has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject?

Yes

If so, why?

An "idea-feeling" of the photographer has been expressed visually by means of symbols.

What kind of influence did the artist or photographer have on the subject?

It appears as though the photographer did not direct the subjects in the photograph – but rather waited and made the picture at "the decisive moment."

Do you think the picture was candid or posed? Why?

The picture appears to be candid because of the following:

Existing Light

Blurred Imagery

The photographer's use of a miniature camera

The people appear to be natural and "true-to-life

Does the picture work as an "Equivalent" or "Metaphor"?

Yes

If so, what is the idea or feeling that is expressed?

A painful and absurd separation from reality requires a guide to help you leave the fantasy situation and return to reality.

If the picture portrays an inner state of mind, then what state of mind does it portray?

A painful and absurd separation from reality requires a guide to help you leave the fantasy situation and return to reality.

Guidance may be required to help us get through these experiences.

Are your feelings about the picture supported by the form (or design-motifs) and the meaning of the various symbols?

Yes

If not, then re-check your interpretation of the picture.
If they are, then you are probably on the right track!

Now, put aside the picture for a reasonable period of time, and then look at the picture again.

Are your feelings about the picture the same as before or are they different?

My feelings about the picture are essentially the same – but over a period of time I have gotten new insights about the picture.

In what ways have they changed?

Not applicable

What new insights do you have about the picture now that you did not have before?

The clown-like face seems to suggest absurdity.
The ghost-like forms suggest ghosts from the past.
The heart-like shape seems to symbolize human emotions.
The curtain in the background symbolizes separation.

You may be able to obtain insights from sources outside of yourself that can help to shape your understanding of a picture. Sometime during the analysis of a picture you should answer the following questions:

If the picture has a title, what does the title suggest to you? (not applicable)

What facts can you learn about the picture from the artist who created it, art critics, or published materials?

There is one historical fact, known about the artist, that can help in the understanding of this picture. The photographer had a problem with his son-in-law, at the time, that completely disrupted the entire family and caused a great deal of anguish and emotional pain. The marriage required guidance counseling but nevertheless ended in separation and an eventual divorce.

What can you learn from other pictures, made by the same artist, that might help you to better understand this picture?

ON ANALYZING A PICTURE STORY

When you analyze a picture story, it may be helpful to ask the following questions:

(1) What is it about?

(2) What is its justification for being in the magazine?

(3) Who is the story about?

(4) What governed the choice of the lead picture?

(5) Why wasn't some other picture used in the series?

(6) How do the pictures relate to one another?

(7) What theme holds them together?

(8) Is there an idea such as love or hate?

(9) Does one person appear in all of the pictures?

Exercises

(1) Pick 8 pictures to slam a theatrical company.

(2) Pick 6 pictures to dig the people of another country.

(3) Select pictures with captions and change the verbal context.

(4) Put two or more pictures together to build up the idea of impending doom and then add one to reverse the feeling into a gag that is ironic or satirical.

Make the reversal turn it slaphappy.

(5) Take 3 unrelated pictures and relate them by captions, which apply to all of of the pictures.

Appendix B – The Concepts

Concepts About Light

The presence of light in a picture will have an emotional effect on the viewer. The proper lighting can evoke “the desired emotional response” in the viewer. And, if the artist or photographer understands the emotional qualities of light, he or she will be in a better position to control the response. To the viewer, it becomes very important what kind of light is present. The revealing light of an overcast day will create a different feeling than a directional light, such as sunlight, which casts shadows and evokes warmth. Furthermore, the shape and form of objects can be revealed or destroyed by shadows.

- Directional Light intensifies a shape. It causes an interaction between the light and an object. The emotions of the viewer will react both to the subject and the light.

- Revealing Light presents everything that there is. It makes us conscious of the object itself, and it creates no blocked up shadows or highlights. Revealing Light produces emotional responses which come from the object. It seems to envelop, and may produce a feeling of luminosity or mild oppression.

- Light As A Source creates an awareness of light and the light source itself seems to become a part of the light. This lighting is intense and dramatic.

- Internal Light is a strange type of lighting, where there appears to be "a play of light" within the object itself. The light appears to glow, and it produces a mystical, other-worldliness type of feeling.

- Play Of Light is the name given to the kind of light that lies outside the picture: and plays on objects, with objects, or creates "dancing" shadows.

Concepts About Space

The sense of three-dimensional space, which we can sense in a picture, is an illusion. Nevertheless, the space in a picture affects us emotionally and we respond to it. Space can be primary to the meaning of a picture.

- Limited Space creates the feeling of intimacy or confinement; sometimes a mixture of both. It can suggest: closeness, comfort, intimacy, tightness, imprisonment, or even a feeling of claustrophobia. Sometimes, the feelings of limited space that are experienced come more from other elements present in the picture than from sensations of space.

- Moderately Deep Space or Medium Space creates a feeling of comfort. Space seems to expand somewhat within the picture.

- Deep Space (or Far Space) suggests distance, remoteness, loneliness, wonder, or a nostalgic feeling about space. It can be achieved by: (1) Using both near and far objects within the picture, (2) the use of "The Ground Plane" (seen from near to far), or (3) using "The Inclined Plane" of both ground and sky.

The concepts of Planemetric Space and Recessional Space may be used to explain how movement into space is accomplished. When the planes in a picture are parallel to the picture plane, "the situation" is called Planemetric. When the planes of the image are diagonal to the picture plane, the situation is called Recessional.

Recessional Space is more dynamic and has a feeling of faster movement than Planemetric Space. Recessional Space appears to lead us into the picture; Planemetric Space seems to block us out of the picture.

When we speak about planes in a picture, it is important for us to remember that planes are not always solid. Planes can be "perforated," as is the case with screen doors, fences, and windows. Some planes are implied, for example, a row of trees on the edge of a pond.

There are occasions when the monocular vision of the camera affects the rendering of depth. Space in a picture can be "collapsed or telescoped." When space is telescoped, the various planes within the picture come together even though in reality they are apart.

If there is no way of telling the size of the area shown in a picture, and if a part of the subject is not oriented to the rest of the subject, the subject may appear to "shift in space" from near to far. Parts "pop in and out," or "fluctuate" within space. Fluctuating Space lacks both the intimate feeling of Limited Space and the nostalgia of Deep Space. It produces a kind of strange, shifting, insecure feeling in the viewer.

Concepts About Form

Openness and closedness are feeling states that we encounter daily. Every picture that we see has some kind of relationship to "openness" and closedness. "Open Form" is identified by the incompleteness of all or most of the objects seen – such as heads cut in half or parts of a car. "Closed Form" exhibits all of the objects complete (such as whole heads, whole bodies, or all of a car). It isolates a fragment of reality and evokes the sensation of completeness within the picture.

In Closed Form, the directions are parallel to the edges of a picture. They can be horizontal, vertical, or they may be both horizontal and vertical. Closed Form shows the main subject entirely within the picture frame. It seems to isolate the subject from the world and impose some sort of man-made order upon it. It may be too static. It produces an awareness of order, solidity, and classic stability. There is a feeling that a little world lives an independent existence within the picture frame.

In Open Form, "the major directions within the picture area" are at an angle, not parallel, to the format. The directions are "diagonal," "circular," or "curved." The form is cut by the frame, and not all of the subject is enclosed. The subjects may consist of parts, instead of total entities. Open Form gives the suggestion that something is going on outside or beyond the picture area. There is an emotional implication of cutting. At times, it may be too chaotic. But, it provides an awareness of the romantic, the spontaneous, disorder, and instability.

Concepts About Tone

The tonal distribution within a picture has an emotional effect upon the viewer. Tones may suggest a statement, soften or tone down the statement, or produce a second statement. Contrast, for example, augments the dynamic. Low contrast suggests passivity.

- The Dark Tones seem gloomy, morbid, heavy, or suggest heavy oppression, night, weight, strength and stability, death, and desolation. They may seem mysterious, pessimistic, or evoke somber moods. They can also suggest richness, the unknown, hidden intimacy or gloom.

- The Middle Tones suggest reality, however they are not necessarily uninteresting. They can be neutral, somber, thoughtful or passive.

- Light Tones suggest “another worldly type of feeling.” They have an ethereal, floating quality. These tones are exciting, but they are sometimes associated with artificiality. They can convey a degree of optimism or joy. They can also be fresh, bright, frivolous or stark.

Concepts About Value Patterns

The light, middle, and dark value patterns will not always conform to the shape of the objects. They may set up a different pattern and consequently the effect will be different. This does not occur frequently, but when it does occur, “A Hidden Source Of Evocation May Erupt.” The “value patterns” that are present in the image have a subtle evocative power. What the value patterns of a picture actually evoke in the spectator may or may not be the same as what the subject evokes.

Concepts About Objects

The size of objects in a picture affects the viewer in still other ways. Large objects, which take up most of the picture area, appear to be monumental, overpowering, and uncomfortable. Medium size objects suggest reality and a feeling of comfort. Small, “spotty” objects make us feel nervousness and suggest busyness.

The creative artist must be concerned with “negative space” or the shape between objects. Sometimes, the shape of the negative space suggests a third object.

Concepts About Balance

If the basic structure works, the photograph will work. Diverse elements can be put into the same area and pulled together, if a photograph balances.

In a photograph, “Tensions Are Built Up By Directions And Weight.” The closeness or proximity of objects builds up more tension than when object or lines actually meet. If the directions within a photograph do not balance, “tension” is of primary importance and it must be considered. Tensions, within a photograph, may be resolved by: (1) directions which are opposite and equal, (2) directions which “oppose” one another at right angles, (3) directions that oppose at something other than right angles, (4) directions which meet, and (5) space that “absorbs” weight or direction.

The size, tone, or color of objects may have an affect on their apparent weight. A black mass may feel heavier than a light colored one, but this is not always the case. Large forms seem to have less weight than a collection of little ones.

Balance can be created by both nature and man. At times, it may be purely psychological, such as the feeling that we are able to “escape” to one side within a photograph. But, if it is not “psychological” in nature, it can be classified according to type. There are three primary types of balance: Formal, Asymmetrical (Informal), and Intuitive or Occult Balance.

Intuitive Balance, or Occult Balance, is both subtle and intuitive. It indicates “The Movement Of Action,” whereas if the design is formal or symmetrical, it indicates “The Movement Of Standing Still.” In Occult Balance, unlike parts are arranged around a balancing point, and they hold the total in equilibrium by their pull.

The Concept Of Essence

There are two concepts that lie at the heart of unique photography. The Concept of Essence is one, the Concept of Experience is the other. Essence refers to that “underlying strata of meaning” – from which all secondary characteristics radiate. Hence, it is “the core,” the heart, the central motive – in short the essence of a person, place or event, or gesture – from which the whole person, place or event may be reconstructed.

To reach essence, the photographer cannot work as the painter does. The photographer cannot "pile up" characteristics until an essence is synthesized; he must wait until a face, gesture, or place goes "transparent" – and thereby reveals the essence underneath. This exact instant, when the subject bares its inner core, is a very transitory and fleeting moment. It is never repeated exactly. The expressive function of the camera is to make photographs that reveal the essence of the subject, along with the facts.

It is difficult to photograph essence. Essence photographs are rare because only rarely can the photographer put himself in place of something else – and at the same time be aware of himself or his own existence.

The photographer should be aware of what he projects when he photographs. It is possible to "project" oneself into the subject without being aware of it. Photographing with a "blank mind" leads the photographer into making contact with the subject, but it prevents him from forcing his preconceptions upon it. There are five "bodies" from which we can project" …Our body of associations "this reminds me of a picture that I saw before"; our body of ideas and concepts, "this fits into Type C or Class 2 or Form 6"; our kinesthetic body, "my hand and fingers sympathize"; our emotional body, "out of my emotional repertoire this stirs my feelings of love"; and our intuitive body, which most of us know so little about. We can project from any of these bodies – or parts of them. The only thing that is not a projection is the essence of some thing or someone else.

Essence And The Dominant Image

The dominant image photographer believes, that in the right light, surfaces will reveal the "inner meaning" of the subject. He believes that every image inherently contains one photographic image, which can reveal the facts of the place, person, situation, or object – and when the light is right – some of the emotional feeling. The photographer whose attitude is primarily dominant assumes that every subject has a dominant image.

In making dominant images, the photographer when he must will sacrifice feeling in order to keep the unmistakable likeness – truth to facts. The photographer, with "essence" on his mind, will distort the facts if there is no other way to crystallize essence.

Essence points at the uniqueness of the place, situation, person or thing. Consequently, more often that not, some fractions or some part will "crystallize the whole" by being that part which stands for the whole.

Essence belongs to the subject and not to the photographer. After a period of time, however, the fascination with “objective essences” can turn into introspection. If this happens, the photographer may recognize that there is a kind of “chemical union” of himself with a place, person, situation, or thing.

The Dominant Image and The Essence Image are concerned with “Things For What They Are.” With “The Essence Image,” the photographer tries to work from the intuitive or “sensed reality” of the subject. In both types of images, the attitude of the photographer is to find the wonder and revelation of a subject through the direct experience of “The Thing For What It Is.”

The Concept Of Experience

Experience refers to that part of an event, place, situation, or person that may be shared with others by means of the photograph. Edward Weston evokes the experience of beauty in his photographs, Ansel Adams evokes the experience of goodness, W. Eugene Smith evokes the experience of truth, Alfred Stieglitz evokes the experience of “transcendence,” and Ruth Burnhard evokes the experience of the mystical.

“The Concept Of Experience” is a useful concept when trying to come at the problem of a particular photograph’s relation to a work of art, because it allows a direct approach to the photograph itself. If the photograph evokes the experience of beauty, truth, or goodness or what the viewer associates with “the aesthetic experience,” then the photograph fulfills one of the functions of a work of art.

The Subconscious Mind In Photography

The photographic image can be a record of an “inner state” that the photographer “neither remembers seeing nor experiencing” at the moment of exposure. The photographer can put things into the subconscious and get a visual answer in due time – if he works in a seeing state with a blank and responsive mind, and if something is fed into the subconscious mind through meditation. Sometimes, the relationship between what has been fed into the subconscious can be seen instantly – sometimes only after the print is seen in meditation.

The Unconscious Creative Cycle

The photographer's task is to make emotional feelings come out visually. The process by which this occurs can be called; The Unconscious Creative Cycle. First, an "idea-feeling" becomes isolated and drops to the subconscious from the surface mind. The photographer's mind is thus sensitized and found objects – or objects in the studio – develop into an idea when put together. Next, there is a "visual echo" of the "idea-feeling." The photographer recognizes that something exciting has happened, but he may or may not know the cause. The photograph may be the result of contemplation and previsualization; or it can be created very quickly as a result of the photographer's "recognition" that something of importance has taken place. Finally, the new photograph is contemplated and the "idea-feeling" is identified. The "conscious" and "unconscious" are united by "feeling," which leads to their fusion in a spontaneous public image or photograph.

To understand how The Unconscious Creative Cycle works, we must understand what "the blank mind" is – and how contemplation is used to limber up the subconscious mind. Contemplation can be directed "inward" or "outward" as the individual wishes, and so there are two very distinct types of contemplation – the subjective and the objective.

Subjective Contemplation of an object or a photograph is undertaken for the express purpose of revealing some aspect of the "self" of the viewer. The direction of Subjective Contemplation is inward, because of the viewer's association with the contemplative act.

The aim of Objective Contemplation is the opposite of "self-discovery." It is undertaken when the purposes of Subjective Contemplation have run their course, and its purpose is to establish a rapport with the physical world. Objective Contemplation seeks to uncover the meanings of things in the outside world. It reports facts, it allows us to look at the photograph as a unique object in the world, and it allows the viewer to establish contact with the photographer.

The dominant feature of "the blank mind" is the absence of preconceived ideas. Preconceived ideas serve to obscure the receptivity of the conscious mind. When the state of the mind is "blank," intuition and perception function at their best – because the subconscious will overcome "the surface mind" when the moment of recognition strikes. In this state, one can turn the "seeing" inward or outward at will.

Expressive And Creative Photography

The term "creative" stands for that kind of photograph which communicates what one has to say to another person. The term "expressive" stands for the use of the camera to discover one's inner self. Since the creative photograph is expected to evoke a predetermined mood in the viewer, the photographer should know what he wishes to communicate so well that he can find the right means and the proper photograph to make another person understand what he is trying to say. The creative photographer looks at everything – to see if it might possibly be the photograph that he is searching for.

The whole creative process of understanding a subject is colored by also trying to see if its "essence" is similar enough to some abstract idea to be a possible subject for that idea. But, this kind of creative photography requires a sensitivity to the unique implications of a subject, then selecting the one which is photogenic at the moment.

There is a second approach to creative photograph – in which the photographer attempts to understand all the possible implications of a subject – and then sees if one implication might be similar enough to the idea in his mind to illustrate it and make it visible.

The first is accomplished by photographing the subject itself in a way that reveals its character; the second, by choosing a subject to photograph, which will illustrate an idea existing only in the mind of the photographer. The first method requires the photographer to understand the subject; the second requires him to recognize what will convey a meaning.

Both of these approaches to creative photography rely upon the capacity of the medium to convey feelings about the subject through another subject. When photography is used in this manner, the physical nature of the subject is immaterial. The photographer must be open-minded to all subjects, and look for a subject capable of communicating his concept to an audience.

Creativeness in photography is found exclusively in The Perceptive-Phase, or the period prior to exposure, rather than in The Execution-Phase of photography. Fortunately, the photographer is conditioned by his medium to automatically recognize the exact moment when a subject is fully revealed.

In The Perceptive-Phase, there are three ways in which the photographer can practice creativeness. The first way is to understand the meaning of the subject – although it is important to understand that what we perceive about the subject colors our understanding about it; the second way is to understand all of the implications of the subject and then use one in order to illustrate an idea; and the third way is to establish a "mutual understanding" between the photographer and the subject, which can develop into a state of mutual creativeness.

While the expressive photograph has significance for the photographer, it may be meaningless – or mean something entirely different to others. The photographer may see something and record it without once considering the feelings of those who may see it. This is the kind of photograph that allows the photographer to explore his own personality, and it is made when you want to photograph in order to contemplate and analyze what a photograph really means to you.

Expressive photography allows the photographer to learn what he has to say. In creative photography, the problem is to make photographs that will have significance and evoke a predetermined emotion in the viewer. Expressive photography shows you what you have to say – and there is a constant alternation between this and creative photography. It is a dual process – studying one's own inner growth, and then creating.

Public And Private Images

An image is public when it is understandable by the general public. The photographer's emotional feelings come through visually because: (1) the subject matter is literal, (2) the subject matter is non-literal but it is rendered with "shared symbols," or (3) titles guide the audience to the desired response.

An image is private when it has a limited audience. If non-literal subject matter is rendered without the use of "shared symbols," or if the audience is not sophisticated enough to respond adequately to the photograph, the emotional feelings of the photographer will not come through visually.

Channeling The Spectator's Associations

The photographer loses control of communication when the spectator is left to his own associations. The only dependable way of working in the private world of other people's associations and mental images is to channel the spectator's association with a title. A photograph may need a title because it does not function as a source of information. It may be meaningful only if the subject is treated as a kind of "peg" to hang symbols upon. At the opposite extreme, the identification of subject matter can be so obvious that a title is necessary to suggest how the picture might be experienced more fully.

The Record Of An Inner State

The "objectivity" of the camera enables the photographer to turn it inward and use it as a means of self-discovery. However, an image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. A meaning or event, occurring in a photograph, may be entirely independent of the photographer. When an urgency is present, it seems to find many mirrors of itself in the visible world. The photograph, which is a record of some "inner state," can function as a means of self-discovery. It can help the photographer to understand what his "inner state" was at the time the photograph was made. If this kind of photograph is exhibited, the camera can "hold up" a piece of the photographer's "psyche" for public display.

Mirror Images

The Mirror Image is in the realm of "Things For What Else They Are" or "What Things Are In The Process Of Becoming." Mirroring starts with the self-portrait. If the photographer changes expression, he brings some "inner change" to the surface of his face for the camera to see. In effect, his facial expression acts as "a mirror" of some aspect of his inner self. Mirroring, however, goes much farther than that. The similarities of any kind, that one feels to be parallel to one's self, may act as a mirror – at least to the photographer.

Probe Images

The Probe Image is one that causes a viewer to "look" into himself. Unfortunately, because picture audiences find it discomforting to take a searching look at themselves, there is a tendency to dismiss these penetrating photographs as psychologically distressing. The Probe Image seems to have an unpredictable life of its own – some find it to be therapy, and others find it exciting. There is no sure way to plan a photograph so that it will act as a probe.

Dream Images

The Dream Image appears to be a visual message from the psyche to the photographer. The image should be read by the photographer, but it is a personal message – and not really meant for public viewing. One can learn to interpret Dream Images just about as easily as one learns to read a new language, however not all photographs should be read.

Message Images

The Message Image is very similar to the Dream Image in appearance, in the necessity to recognize when a “message” is present, and in the knowledge that is required to read it.

Both Dream and Message Images appear as hard reality. The difference between them is really quite simple. The Message Image comes from a source independent of the photographer’s psyche. The content is new material that the person could never have thought of. The content is objective – not imagined. This is the remarkable part of the Message Image.

The Mirror Images of Things For What Else They Are, and all of the variations, extend beyond sight and insight. Content and transcendence are important but not the manner nor the means which the photographer chooses to employ. Realism may be stretched to the point of abstraction; but some tie with “the world of appearances” must be maintained, or else the camera’s strongest point – its authenticity – will be irretrievably lost.

The Equivalent

The Equivalent established the core of the kind of art photography will be. In this approach, the subject is treated without regard either for its individuality or its essence, or the reaction it causes in the photographer; but it is treated as the medium of expression. The photograph functions as a metaphor, and the camera sees through the world of surfaces to the implications of the subject.

Stieglitz used clouds and people for “Equivalents,” but it makes no difference what subject matter is used. “Equivalence” is not a style. It is a function between the spectator, the photograph, and extending in time perhaps to the person who made it. It can be a mirror of one’s inner self. If a feeling of loneliness is uppermost in the consciousness of the photographer, an old building, a part, a pond of lilies, or even a lamppost will provide the subject matter for the camera. The same subject matter can communicate other feelings as well.

The Process Of Equivalence

It was Stieglitz' response to his subject matter which made "The Equivalence." This special response may be described as an image taken into a person and retained because it is wanted. Once this image is within a person, it is turned into his own private image. This private image will cross a person's mind from time to time, even thought it may not be understood. Because of some human emotion arising out of fear, love, annoyance, anger, joy, or human trust, etc., there is a desire or a compulsion to remember the image. It is held close within the person and it therefore changes him in some way.

An Equivalent evokes a feeling similar to one which already exists in some other event or photograph. It works by means of "the power of suggestion"; and the mind of the spectator must get past the intellectual symbolism of the photograph, because the photograph should evoke a feeling – not an intellectual idea.

A photograph may act as an Equivalent to another photograph in this manner: Photograph A is expressive. It has meaning only for the photographer in that it is a stage of growth. Photograph A1 gives feeling to you but also to someone else, and is derived from self-exploration. If photograph B has the feeling of A1, it is said to be equivalent to photograph A1.

When a photograph functions for a given person as an Equivalent, it is acting as a symbol, or plays the role of a metaphor, for something that is beyond the subject photographed. It is both a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol. (A spontaneous symbol is one that develops automatically to fill the need of the moment.) Equivalence is a two-way reaction between the photograph + the person looking at the photograph – and the person's mental image. It is only in the mental image held that there is any possibility of a metaphorical function occurring.

A photograph functions as an Equivalent in the viewer's psyche, by the mechanisms of "projection" and "empathy." If the viewer is not subject-identification bound, he will respond to the expressive qualities of shapes and forms – on a subconscious level. The effect that seems to be associated with Equivalence may be described in this manner: When both the subject matter and the manner of rendering are transcended, that which seems to be matter becomes what seems to be spirit.

Equivalence revolves around "the remembered image." What we remember is peculiarly our own, because various distortions take place and change "the recall image" – after the original stimulation has gone. These alterations from the original come from the individual himself, and so the response to an Equivalent must remain a private, untranslatable experience, which lies entirely within the individual.

Communication By The Equivalent

Any photograph can function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the viewer realizes that for him, what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself, and if the photograph "mirrors something within him," then his experience is some degree of Equivalence. An Equivalent, tells the viewer in effect, "I had a feeling about something and here is a metaphor of my feeling." The thing that is significant here is that what the photographer had a feeling about was not for the subject he photographed – but for something else. The forms of a cloud may correspond to the photographer's feelings about a certain person and remind him of the person. If the viewer catches in the photograph the same "feeling" which the photographer experienced, and if the viewer's feelings are similar to those of the photographer, then the photographer has aroused a known feeling within him.

The power of the Equivalent, as a vehicle of creative expression, lies in the fact that it can convey and evoke feelings about things, situations, and events, which for one reason or another cannot be photographed. The Equivalent enables the photographer to make use of the forms and shapes of objects for their expressive-evocative qualities. The Equivalent does not express the feeling that the photographer had for the subject of the photograph; but rather it is the expression of a feeling that lies within the man himself. The "plastic material" of the visual world is used for the photographer's expressive purposes.

Objects, or forms, can be photographed to obtain an image with specific suggestive powers. In this way, the viewer can be directed into a specific and known feeling state within himself. Materials possessing an infinite variety of forms – such as clouds, water, or ice – can suggest all sorts of emotions, tactile encounters, and intellectual speculations in the spectator. These reactions are formed and supported by the nature of the material – but they maintain an independent identity, which allows the photographer to choose what he wishes to express.

The Equivalent permits the photographer to emphasize the transforming power of the medium over its recording power, by causing the subject to stand for something else. It is equally strong; and it permits the photographer to express a feeling or emotion – or to photograph a subject that is un-photogenic. At one level, the subject matter of the Equivalent is simply a record. But, at another level it may function to arouse planned sensations and emotions.

Photography Of An Inner State Of Mind

What happens in front of a camera may be called the external event; what happens in the mind of the photographer may be called the internal event. What occurs before the camera, and what takes place in the photographer's mind and eye, affect the meaning of pictures.

True communication requires more than just creating an image in the mind's eye – and then producing it as a print. No matter what this image means to the photographer, it does not have essential value unless it enables the viewer to comprehend "The Realities Of The World, And Of The Spirit."

Things For What They Are And Things For What Else They Are

To understand a picture, one needs to go "out of yourself," "out of your way," to understand the essence of the subject. The subject concept goes beyond that which can be seen; it includes factual information about the object, the essence of the object, and the inner facts as well. If the subject is 3-dimensional but it is rendered as a flat object, the creative artist is "making it do something," and it is becoming something else.

When things are rendered as something else, "transpositions" may be made in form, time, texture, density, meaning, resemblance, suggestion etc. A rock may become a landscape and frost on the windowpane may become a sea wave. This kind of a picture requires considerable observation on the part of the creative artist. We must observe all of the changes made by lighting, shadows, objects, in space etc. The concept is a subjective one. When looking at this kind of a picture, the spectator must ask himself: What does the subject remind me of? How do I feel about it? And, What is it equivalent to?

Through the juxtaposition of one object with another, the connotations of each can be made to change. Although the objects themselves are not visually changed by photographing them together – their implication are. And, "the conflict of connotations" now becomes the impact of the picture. The relationship of objects creates a kind of "third effect," and the concept of Things For What Else They Are is extended to still another dimension.

When viewing pictures, it is important to keep in mind that pictures frequently go beyond the literal rendering of objects, and instead may render an inner state of mind. When this happens, the original subject has less and less bearing on the ultimate meaning of the picture, and the mental image within the viewer becomes increasingly the only possible source of his experience. When the link to the original subject is broken or stretched thin, the viewer is left to his own association. This intangible realm of controlling the viewer's "mental image," has become for many creative artists, a field of communication.

We make mental adjustments and permit "shades of gray" to stand for color, "two dimensions to stand for three," and "picture size to stand for life size"; but in spite of our acceptance of "authenticity" in a life-like painting or photograph, a tree in a picture is not the tree itself. The picture is not reality. When the mind is freed from thinking only in terms of surfaces, textures, form, and substance, we will be able to think of these elements (and the subject matter itself) as symbols, metaphors, and Equivalents that enable us to depict the inner world – or render the invisible visible.

Photographs Function As Symbols

Photographs are symbols of life experiences. We may look at a face and see a deeper truth that lies beneath the surface. This inner image, replaces in our mind, the "mask" that the person presents. Thus, subject matter need not be literal. The camera can reveal the essence of the thing before it – or it can portray universal feelings. A photograph can reveal the perceptions and emotions of its creator in response to a particular environment.

Appendix C – Art & Design Motifs
(Active Analysis By Memory/Association)

Each symbol is a simplification, or "graphic shorthand," of things, which we have seen so frequently in nature that the memory of them is automatically stimulated by the line – and with the memory, comes its habitual emotional association. In order to perform active analysis by Memory/Association, determine the dominant structure of the photograph or painting – then assign its Memory/Association meaning.

Design Motifs	**Meanings**
Horizontals	Repose, Calm, Peace, Finality

If the character of the lines is too lively and nervous, or if the tones are rough and broken, the restfulness of "the motif" will be destroyed. If the line lifts slightly near the center, vigor and tension are felt in it.

Verticals	Immobility, Stability, Dignity Austerity, Majesty

If the proportions are perfect and a sense of great height is given to the vertical forms by their placement and their scale, the vertical symbol becomes the most imperious of all the motifs in the language of design. When the vertical forms come very close to the top of the picture, there is almost invariably a suggestion of coldness and remoteness in the subject.

Rich tones, such as gold, brown, deep red and turquoise, contribute weight to the towering vertical masses and functional ornament of the picture. If austerity or architectural monumentality is predominant in the mind of the artist or photographer, then a colder and more restrained color scheme is requisite to the picture.

Vertical – Horizontal	Eliminates All Sense Of Movement, Expression Of Extreme Stolidity And Stubbornness

If the maximum of solidity and stubbornness is to be conveyed, then there should be rigidly separated contrasts of light and dark, and uncompromising areas of the strong, heavy hues – such as brown, black, earth red and cedar green or slate blue. This is a direct and forthright motif which graceful subtleties of color might weaken.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Pyramid	Imposing Dignity, Alertness
Gothic Arch	Spiritual Aspiration, Contemplation

The vertical lines should be slender and long. Heavy verticals may suggest a crypt or dungeon. Colors are generally grays and whites with delicate drawing in darker colors (such as greens, blues, and browns). The use of over-brilliant prismatic colors seems to defeat the message of the design.

Roman Arch	Weight, Somberness, Solidity Stolidity When It Is Applied To Human Figures
Grief Line	Tragedy, Melancholy

The "Grief Line" is a curved, slowly descending line. The prevalent color scheme is black, blue and blue-green, which is relived by very small areas (or under-tones) of a warm color for decorative interest and to intensify the morbidity of the closely related cold dark tones. If the expression were intended to reach the intensity of a tragedy, it would appear justified to use flashes of the more menacing hues in the black areas such as very hot orange or volcanic red. The dark and cool browns are also melancholy.

Spheres In Profusion	Comfort, Opulence, Luxuriance Richness

The colors are lush and luxuriant rather than weak tints.

Pointed Shapes	Alertness, Keenness, Vivacity, Penetration

The "glitter" of reflected light is an essential part of our image alertness. Lively contrasts of light and dark give the picture a sense of keen activity.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Unsupported Diagonal	Movement, Insecurity

The nature of the movement and its rapidity depend partly upon the inclination of the diagonal and partly upon the picture itself. There are two common devices in the diagonal to express movement, which augment its activity. One is to employ the static vertical, or vertical-horizontal motif as a foil or contrast to the movement. The second is to employ a motif of movement in the opposite direction, which accentuates the sense of speed as when trains or cars pass each other in opposite directions. It may also create “the illusion” of counter-movement. Diagonals are not nearly so effective in the suggestion of movement if they extend to the edge of the design.

If the diagonal reaches from corner to corner, it becomes perfectly static like a cross-brace. Also, if it comes to rest against the side of the rectangle, all suggestion of movement ceases.

“Unsupported Diagonals,” used for the suggestion of movement across the wall of a plane, seem to have the greatest dignity and decorative integrity. These diagonals can also be used to suggest movement either forward or backward into space by increasing or diminishing the scale of the figures.

The sense of movement induced by the diagonals is greatly amplified if there are movements of color in the design. The color movement may be in the same direction as the diagonals – or in reverse – in which case the picture becomes even more active. Color movements are generally achieved by “progressions” from subdued areas through passages of increasing intensity – to a point where the hue is at full brilliance.

Partially Supported Diagonals — Powerful Movement

Symbols of speed include arrowheads, comets, rockets, hair blowing in the wind, and horizontal streaks.

Wave Curve — Graceful Energy And Movement
Youth

Carried on to still greater energy, and even to violence, the motif may resemble the storm wave – and the emotional reaction is then one of turbulence and unrest. If carried to the extreme, with violent contrasts of light and dark, the storm wave may give us the sensation of an approaching disaster. In any case it loses its symbolism of youth’s graceful vigor, to suggest something more violent and disturbing.

Design Motifs	**Meanings**
Sunrise Motif (upward concentric arcs)	Ever Expanding & Infinite Space, The Process Of Growth, Exultation, Depression (if employed downward)

When the arcs are inverted, the picture's mood becomes either heavy or tragic. "Blocky" or dull figures in weary gestures will defeat the motif even if perfectly fitted into the arc pattern. Insofar as color is concerned, the strongest glow should be near the center of the expanding arcs, and the most brilliant color should be at some distance from the central glow.

Conflicting Diagonals	Combat, Conflicts (such as a conflict of passions or ideas), Hostility, Struggle, Agitation, Confusion

Violence of color can be obtained by the juxtaposition of dissonant hues of great brilliance.

Spiral	A Generative Force Or Great Force, Dynamic, Motion, Power, Excitement
Zigzag	Animation, Excitement, Agitation Restlessness

The extremely nervous variant of the "zigzag," which takes the form of a lightning flash, is the most potent expression of a frantic sort of agitation. It is a very disturbing movement because its source is one of the most terrifying of common natural spectacles. It should be reserved for pictures that reflect a shattering sort of human experience.

Effects of light are an important factor in the expression of this motif. Dark, torn edges silhouetted against the light are as effective emotionally as fulminating tongues of flame-like color. Spiral swirls are the most effective foil to the erratic movements of the lines.

Gnarled Tree	A Struggle Against Adverse Conditions, A Search For Paths Of Less Resistance or Greater Nourishment, Obstacles, Writhing, Twisting, Inherent Viability, Vigor

Design Motifs	Meanings
Vibrations	Tensions And Forces That Surround

Vibrations can be symbolized by “shimmering or flickering objects,” rapidly repeated dots or lines, vibrant colors, and through our associations and memories of things that are tense and quivering.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Cascade	Pleasurable, Playful, Swift, Sometimes Powerful

Subjects for the “Cascade Motif” include: light drapery over seated or standing figures, groups of people descending a staircase, or a waterfall.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Vanishing Point Perspective	Finite Or Limited Places, Box-Like Enclosures
Inverted Perspective	An Infinite Universe, An Amplitude Of Space, Avoids Any Sense Of Congestion
Rhythmic Lines	Grace, Charm, Movement
Light Lines	Hope Ambition
Broken Shapes	Instability, Uncertainty
Rectangular Shapes	Stability, Strength, Unity
Circles	Immensity or Vastness, Eternity, Equality, Unity (If only one circle is present), Motion, Deliverance
Ovals	Femininity, Creativeness, Sensuality, Perpetuation, Grace
Informal Subdivision	Activity, Excitement, Elasticity, Progress
Formal Subdivision	Dignity, Strength, Unity, Balance, Formality.

Color Symbolism

Color symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. And, research has shown that most colors have more positive associations with them than negative.

Black

Black is the color of the night, and of “evil.” Black can also be a color of elegance or class. Black can also represent ideas such as power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, unhappiness, depth, style, sadness, remorse, anger, and mourning. Black can also represent a lack of color, the primordial void, and emptiness. Black expresses the depths of the unknown, and encourages the imagination of a different world from that of daylight realities. Used by itself, black can represent bad luck or misfortune.

Black/White

Black and white stands for mourning and cheerless occasions. For example, traditional garb for a funeral is black and white. Black symbolizes the loss, and white the passing onto the heavens.

Blue

Blue may be associated with pure qualities. In addition, it is the color of water and the sea, with all of its symbolism. Blue usually indicates femininity, life, purity, etc., just as water does. Blue can also symbolize peace, calm, stability, security, loyalty, sky, water, cold, technology, and depression.

Brown

Brown represents the ideas of earth, hearth, home, the outdoors, comfort, endurance, simplicity, and comfort.

Gold

Gold is associated with royalty. It represents the color of the heavens.

Green

Green can represent nature, the environment, good luck, youth, vigor, jealousy, envy, and misfortune. It can be regarded as the color of eternal life as seen in evergreens, which never change their color from season to season.

Orange

Orange can represent energy, balance, warmth, enthusiasm, flamboyant, and demanding of attention.

Pink

The color pink can show childish innocence or a characters child-like personality. It can also be used to show a more flirtatious personality. Pink is normally a color associated with girls and femininity. Pink is considered a color of good health and life – we speak of people being “in the pink” or the “freshness” of a newborn babe. Lastly, pink is associated with sexuality and purity. That is, a girl who is a virgin in heart and body. Pink is symbolic of pure love, for example.

Red

Red can symbolize many things ranging from blood, to love, to infatuation. Basically red symbolizes strong emotions, or things of strong emotions rather than intellectual ideas. For example, red can symbolize excitement, energy, speed, strength, danger, passion, and aggression.

Red is the color of blood and fire – and therefore represents life and vitality. It also signifies the color of the sun: a symbol of energy, radiating its vitalizing life-force into human beings. Red is also looked upon as a sensual color, and can be associated with man-s most profound urges and impulses.

Silver/Gray

Silver/Gray symbolizes security, reliability, intelligence, staid, modesty, maturity, conservative, old age, sadness, and boring.

White

White is a sacred and pure color. It’s the color of angels and gods, as the color reflects that which is sacred and pure. It is also the color of doctors, nurses, and others in the health profession, as well as cleanliness. White can also represent reverence, purity, simplicity, humility, youth, winter, snow, good, cold, clinical, and sterile.

Yellow

Yellow can symbolize joy, happiness, optimism, idealism, gold, dishonesty, cowardice, deceit, illness, and hazard.

Lines And The Character Of A Picture

Determine the "character" of the lines in a picture. They help to give the picture its emotional character. Lines may be flowing, nervous, jerky, jagged, tight, free, hard, distinct, clear-cut, decisive, firm, broad, narrow, sketchy, broken, ragged, smooth, rough, sluggish, dynamic, static, vigorous, animated, turbulent, ejaculatory, staccato, practical, dramatic, disappearing, emotional, swirling, writhing, delicate, flexible, naturalistic, or decorative.

A line may be "a symbol of emotion" expressed in rhythmic movement. It is capable of expressing innumerable moods and qualities. It also can express the essence of the subject matter's personality.

To most people, the straight line suggests rigidity and precision. It is positive, direct, tense, stiff, uncompromising, harsh, hard, and unyielding.

The slightly curved, or undulating line, is loose and flexible. Because of harmonic transition in the change of direction, it has flowing continuity. Its slow, lazy movement is passive, gentle, feminine, aimless, vague, or wandering effect. The more vigorously curved line seems to change direction rapidly. This curve is active and forceful.

Mood Experienced	Design Elements Commonly Used
Excitement	Bright Colors (usually warm), Extreme Contrasts, Unbalance, Diagonal And Zigzag Lines
Strength	Dark Colors, Broad Or Heavy Lines, Large Masses, Solidity, Deliberate Impeded Movement Of Rhythm Or Line
Calm	Grays or Neutral Colors, Cool Colors Horizontals, Gentle Curves Or Gentle Tonal Gradations, Symmetry
Delicacy	Narrow And Light Lines, Lightness, Thinness, A Floating Easy Movement Of Rhythm Or Line, Small Masses

Although the subject matter of two pictures may be completely dissimilar and unrelated, the pictures may be perceived as similar or may evoke similar feelings in the spectator because of a similarity of design. This fact demonstrates that we may perceive and respond to the design of a picture more than we do to its subject matter or representational content. In representational photography and art, therefore, the elements and principles of design are as important as the subject.

If Several Design Elements Suggest A Particular Memory/Association, Then The Mood Of The Picture Will Be Intensified!

Introduction To The Worksheets

The worksheets will enable you to organize your analysis and to insure that you include all of the important points that should be covered. The complexities of analysis increase noticeably when a number of related pictures are to be analyzed – as is the case with a photographic Sequence or a Montage. With these pictures, an "idea-feeling" may extend throughout several inter-related images.

Here the various images are developed and coordinated with one another so that the "idea-feeling" within the picture can express more complex ideas that can be expressed by a single image that stands alone. If more than one "idea-feeling" happens to be present, the "idea-feelings" will need to be understood both as individual "idea-feelings" and as "idea-feelings" that exist as a part of some larger unified whole. Checklists will enable you to keep the visual images, and what you understand about them, well organized regardless of the complexity and quantity of the photographs involved.

You may copy the Worksheets in Appendix D for any of your analysis needs.

Appendix D
(Worksheet For The Analysis Of A Picture)

(1) What is the overall feeling that you get from the picture?

Does it have human or animal-like shapes or qualities?

(2) What are the implied relationships in the picture?

What do they suggest?

(3) What are the various feelings that you get from the picture/

The lighting makes you feel:

The tonality makes you feel:

The space in the picture makes you feel:

Touch/Tactile Sensations make you feel:

Motion/Kinesthetic Sensations make you feel:

Design/Composition Sensations make you feel:

(4) What do the light, middle tone, and dark areas each suggest?

What do they suggest when viewed together?

(5) Now relax, be still with yourself. Contemplate and meditate on the picture for at least 10 minutes.

(6) List what you see in the picture.

(7) What is the subject of the picture?

(8) What action takes place?

(9) What person or object receives the action?

(10) Describe the setting where the action takes place.

(11) If the picture is realistic or documentary, what reality about the subject does it show?

What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

(12) If the subject material is not easily identifiable,

The subject seems to suggest:

The action seems to suggest:

The object or person acted upon seems to suggest:

The setting seems to suggest:

(13) Write one or more paragraphs that describe in detail what happens in the picture.

(14) List the symbols and possible metaphors that you see in the picture – and then write down the associations or meanings that these symbols and possible metaphors have for you according to how they are used in the picture.

(15) Take the paragraph(s) that you wrote, describing the picture, and re-write the paragraph(s) using the symbolic meanings of the various symbols and metaphors that are in the picture – wherever it is appropriate to do so.

(16) How do these symbols and/or metaphors influence one another to affect the meaning of the picture?

(17) What do you think the artist or photographer was trying to say?

(18) How did he or she use each visible part of the picture to help say it?

(19) What is the mood of the picture?

(20) How did the artist or photographer establish this mood?

(21) What are the artist's or photographer's ideas and attitudes towards the subject?

(22) What tricks were used to get the artist's or photographer's ideas across?

(23) What alternatives could the artist or photographer have used to express the same idea or feeling?

(24) Does the picture reveal the essence of the subject?

If so, what essential qualities does it show?

(25) Do you feel as though the artist or photographer has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject?

If so, why?

What kind of influence did the artist or photographer have on the subject?

Do you think the picture was candid or posed? Why?

(26) Does the picture work as an “Equivalent” or “Metaphor”?

If so, what is the idea or feeling that is expressed?

(27) If the picture portrays and inner state of mind, then what state of mind does it portray?

(28) Are your feelings about the picture supported by the form (or design motifs), the content of the picture, and the meaning of the various symbols?

If not, then re-check your interpretation of the picture.
If they are, then you are probably on the right track!

Now, put aside the picture for a reasonable period of time, and then look at the picture again.

(29) Are your feelings about the picture the same as before or are they different?

In what ways have they changed?

(30) What new insights do you have about the picture now that you did not have before?

You may be able to obtain insights from sources outside of yourself that can help to shape your understanding of a picture. Sometime during your analysis of a picture, you should answer the following questions:

- If the picture has a title, what does the title suggest to you?
- Has the artist made any statements about the picture that can help you to better understand it?
- What facts can you learn about the picture from the artist who created it, are critics, or published materials?
- Are there historical facts, known about the artist, that can help you to understand the picture?
- What can you learn from other pictures, made by the same artist, that might help you to better understand this picture?

Appendix E
(Steps In The Creative Photographic Process)

The mental atmosphere, surrounding the photographer,
creates his psychic state of mind.

A stimulus interacts with the photographer's belief or attitude.

A period of meditation may take place in order to put something worthwhile
into the subconscious mind.

A "seed-thought" or "idea-feeling" drops into the photographer's
subconscious mind.

A period of gestation occurs.

Symbols and subject matter give form to the "seed-thought."

An inner excitement takes place in the photographer when the symbols and
subject matter, that the photographer sees, correspond to the "seed-thought."

The photograph is made.
It is a visual metaphor of the "seed-thought."

Archetypal symbols and cultural symbols cause the photograph to evoke
an emotional response in the viewer.
This response gives the photograph meaning.

Archetypal symbols cause a universal response that transcends cultures.
But, cultural symbols limit a viewer's response
unless the viewer is familiar with that culture.

An emotional response, followed by meditation techniques and the use of
intellectual analysis, can lead to understanding.

The use of synchronicity systems can confirm the analysis and can increase
our understanding of a visual image.

What You Should Know About Pictures That No One Ever Told You

Trying to understand pictures can require as little or as much time as you wish. There are countless ways to read a picture and each of them may produce new insights that will help you to understand the picture a little bit better. A picture is like a jigsaw puzzle, each insight that you obtain, can help you to solve another piece of the puzzle. And, that puzzle is made up of many possibilities but only a limited number of probabilities.

Understanding the cultural background of an artist can improve your understanding of a picture. And, if you study the life of the artist or photographer, you will learn a great deal about their creative work. By so doing, you may gain an insight into the mental atmosphere that surrounded the artist at the time. And, perhaps you will understand what drove the artist to create a particular picture or body of work.

One of my favorite methods, for tapping into the subconscious in order to better understand a picture, involves the use of “synchronicity systems.” In my book: Understanding Pictures: theories, exercises, and procedures, I describe in detail how to use this procedure with visual images. Synchronicity systems can uncover hidden meanings and relationships in a picture and they can reveal the mental atmosphere that surrounded the artist or photographer at the time a picture was created.

When using these methods, you can ask such questions as: What was the “mental atmosphere” surrounding the photographer when he made this photograph? If I am casting the I Ching, it is helpful to look at the picture at the same time – in order to focus my attention.

If you would like to know more about a picture, than you are able to glean from the photograph itself, this approach can be very useful. Sometimes, it will be the only way to know certain things about a photograph or a photographer. You will be amazed at how much your subconscious mind and intuition can accurately reveal to you. (When I analyzed Minor White’s photograph “Easter Sunday” by means of the I Ching, and sent my analysis to him, he replied that my I Ching analysis of his photograph was quite accurate. That analysis revealed the psychic state of Minor White at the time the photograph was made and it revealed the state of his health as well.)

It is important to note that an artist's environment helps to create their mental atmosphere. This mental atmosphere will, in turn, create and influence an "idea-feeling" or "seed-thought." The "idea-feeling" or "seed-thought" will then find its way into the subconscious mind where gestation occurs. A photograph is no more and no less a visible manifestation of the "seed-thought" – made visible by means of visual symbols. If we only understand the feelings that are aroused by a photograph, and nothing more, it is not possible to fully understand the meaning and significance of the image.

Blocks To Understanding

Having a feeling, and photographing what causes that feeling, is no assurance that others will experience a similar feeling in the reading of a photograph. A person can read his own photographs rather deeply, but it is questionable whether one can do so to the photographs of another photographer. Most people will either not read a photograph, or else they will read it as a mirror of themselves. Only a trained critic will be more objective and analyze the photograph for itself. This is done by drawing a tight line between interpretation and what one actually sees in the photograph.

Instant Criticism

Immediate value judgments are the prime factor in preventing involvement with photographs. We must be prepared to postpone judgment of "good," "bad," "like," or "dislike" until later. The actions that these words call up destroy any possibility of extending our perception while working with a picture.

Plain Sense Of The Image

Sometimes, whether or not we experience a photograph depends upon our recognition of the subject photographed. There are literal minded and design ignorant people, design conscious and sympathetic viewers, and non-literal or symbolic minded people – and photographs can range from the literal image, where the subject is unmistakable, to the ambiguous or non-literal image.

Wrong Anticipation and Misreading Facts

If a viewer identifies the original subject of an ambiguous photograph incorrectly, obviously he is off on the wrong track. Even if he can verbalize profusely about the photograph, he will misread it. A lack of life experiences is the main reason that young persons are inclined to misread images, but unfamiliar objects usually need captions to get the viewer off on the right track.

Wrong anticipations have a high frequency among viewers. The person who demands that all photographs be of people will find it impossible to fully experience the landscape. The person who believes that all photographs should be beautiful will be blind to those which are not. Preconceptions, and high standards of perfection, prevent involvement with images that fall below an arbitrary standard.

Memory Jogs

Our involvement with images is based upon associations and past experiences. Frequently, an image will serve as a "memory jog" to form associations that lead the viewer away from the picture – and into his past life. The photographer can predict neither the specific "memory jog" nor its effect on a particular viewer. When the train of associations leads the viewer into the realm of past memories – that have no bearing on the image – both the picture and the photographer are lost.

If the viewer keeps his attention on the image, universal associations will prevail that are common to both the viewer and the photographer. It is only when the viewer attends to the image at hand, that the photographer has a chance to make valid predictions of the viewer's potential experience of the photograph.

Compulsive Reactions

A person in a state of identification with something can twist almost any image into a mirror of his or her own inner state. The process is somewhat like the train of associations set off by the "memory jog" – except that it leads into the present. As with the "memory jog," the photographer can never hope to predict experience when this interference occurs.

Stock Answers

Clichés, or stock answers, reveal a poor imagination on the part of the viewer and sidetrack involvement with the image. The most original image in the world can elicit stock answers from a person who has not been able to make contact with the photograph.

Verbalization

Verbalizing is a form of talking that is a substitute for any contact with the image. It is a means of escape from life. It indicates that the viewer is avoiding contact with certain forms of life as they are represented in a photograph. Verbalization is monotonous, full of clichés, and unrelated to the content of a photograph. It is closely related to stock answers.

When our feelings and reactions are expressed photographically, we need not express them by verbalizing about our photographs. They are in the print for all to read. The perception and awareness of the viewer should allow him to understand the creative intentions of the photographer. If the viewer has visual awareness, he will be able to perceive meaning from the photograph without verbalization on the part of the photographer.

Doctrinal Adhesions

A person's stand in relation to religion, politics, schools of art, or fields of photography, etc., can be a strong barrier to involvement with images.

Sentimentality

Personal and emotional tie-ups are generally unpredictable. Inhibitions not only affect a person's life, they affect his acceptance of images. In an apparently random way, they determine the viewer's acceptance or rejection of certain kinds of photographs. Inhibitions in life are carried over to looking at images in photography, and they have a similar effect on response as prejudices and preconceptions.

Feeling Of Inadequacy

Feelings of inadequacy occur when there is a feeling that the photo image in question has a "right " answer, or a specific meaning, and the person is afraid to make a mistake. There may be a variety of causes, including: a real inability to verbalize, a determination to keep the visual experience free of "verbal entanglements," or simply a failure to get involved and a reluctance to admit that "no reaction" has taken place.

Avoidance Of The Issue When Under Pressure

This commonly occurs in a classroom, workshop, or interview situation, when a person is expected to externalize his experience. Avoidance takes place when the viewer must say something, but there is little or no involvement with the image. The viewer may: describe the subject, describe and criticize the composition, and describe or question the technique. Technical questions are a standard reaction. Sometimes, the viewer wants to find out how the image was made in order to later go out and do the same. The description may mask angers aroused because the viewer is forced to observe his failure to make contact with the image – or the viewer may describe the obvious because he is afraid of making mistakes. Saying, "I like it" without elaboration is another form of avoidance.

Emotional Blocks Through Analysis

It is important to guard against emotional blocks that can occur when intellectual analysis takes place. Responses may be emotional as well as intellectual. It is possible for an image to hold something for the viewer intellectually and be an emotional blank.

The Identification Of Subject Matter

The identification of subject matter is the lowest common denominator of a response to a photograph. A meaningful experience with a photograph requires some degree of imagination on the viewer's part – if there is to be an interaction between the photograph and the viewer. At best, a photograph is a step towards a mental image. And, it is by means of the mental image evoked in another person that photography is able to communicate.

Multivalence

Multivalence is a term that refers to the possibility of more than one meaning (or interpretation) to the same response. For example, "I like it" can mean many things. The person may be inarticulate, the photograph may not offend him in any way – or he may really like it.

When the response is multivalent, the photographer encounters the problem of what to do with the response. Right at the beginning, he is faced with the problem of how well an individual verbalizes his response.

The Person Who Doesn't Want To Do Self-Searching

This person either has no imagination or is deliberately blinding himself to visual experiences that might disturb his basic security. The full range of photographic possibilities of "communication-evocation" is a closed world to him.

Oblivious Response

Some persons react as if they had never seen the picture they are looking at. These viewers would probably give substantially the same response to any photograph. Any photograph would mirror back to them whatever mild compulsion was uppermost at the time.

Rejection

If the photograph is independent of the original subject, the viewer may reject it because he cannot identify the original subject or he may willingly engage the photograph because it is an event in its own right. Photographs, in which the subject is hard to identify, separate viewers into two groups: those who are offended at being denied "subject identification" and reject the photograph – and a second group of sophisticated viewers who will accept the photograph for its own sake.

The literal, or "subject-recognizable photograph," separates an audience into classes along different lines. The literal photograph separates the people oriented from the nature lovers. The viewer, who is a purist, will tend to prefer the representational photograph. The literal photograph acts as a kind of "bridge" from the viewer back to the original subject – the non-literal acts more as a direct source of experience.

Responses can be classified as negative, neutral, and pertinent. A negative or neutral response may turn into a pertinent one even while a person is talking about a photograph. If there is a lapse of time between seeing the photograph and the attempt to verbalize, a change of response is common. The response change of pertinent to neutral or negative is less likely to happen.

Negative responses prevent the viewer from understanding any statement a photograph might possibly communicate – or any feeling it might evoke. However, this must be taken as a general statement because some people will appear to take a delight in photographs that they hate. No one will remember pictures to which they are indifferent.

No Comment

This response often indicates a lack of sensitivity, at least to the photograph in question. The same response to a number of photographs may indicate either a lack of sensitivity to visual matters or an inarticulate but visually minded individual. This type of person may be able to express himself with gestures or pencil and paper drawings. Sometimes a drawing, together with a few words, will reveal the viewer's thoughts or a state of feeling.

I Like It – I Don't Like It

This indicates an incapacity to communicate verbally, or it can indicate a lack of sensitivity on the part of the individual. This response may or may not be true, because the viewer may feel that he has to make some kind of response and so he takes the easiest way out. If he tells you he likes it, he may think your photograph is better – or he may be trying to make you happy.

If a person rejects a photograph, he closes his mind to any further traffic with that image. If the photographer can discover the reasons, they usually provide the photographer with information. Sometimes the photographer is not at fault. The reasons may have little or no connection with the photograph.

I Just Love It

This reaction usually indicates that the image has triggered the individual into remembering some former state of euphoria. The phrase is often followed by a glowing account of the remembered event.

The Changers

Persons who would have taken it differently – or indicate that it should be cropped differently – rarely see the photograph as a statement by another person. “The Changer” either substitutes some problem of his own, or finds his own photograph within the picture. He seldom responds to the picture itself.

This is not really a response but a return to the original subject. The viewer is not responding to what the photograph “says,” but he is using wrong material for what he himself would like to say. The important question is this: Is the viewer changing the photograph in order to make it into his own picture – or is he changing it to clarify what the photographer is trying to say? This is a fascinating response to watch because of what “the Changer” reveals about himself.

The Bluffers

A person may feel compelled to say something about a given photograph because he has agreed beforehand to do so. Stock answers, such as “life and death” or “old and new” may appear out of desperation or when a person is indifferent to a particular photograph.

If a person is a habitual bluffer, this response may be interesting because it takes considerable intelligence to talk one’s way through a photograph in a convincing manner. Sometimes, the bluffer’s response may be pertinent to the photographer because the bluffer may inadvertently cause a moment of understanding for the photographer. On other occasions, as the bluffer talks, “what comes off the top of his head” may lead him toward understanding something about the photograph.

It’s Been Done Before

A person who has had a considerable experience with photographs may reject a photograph that is less successful than others that he is reminded of, or because it reminds him of a class of photographs that he has long wearied of or otherwise rejected. If the attitude denies the viewer entry into the photograph, it is “a negative response; if the discussion points out the correspondence to previous photographs, it may be “a neutral response.” This response ordinarily comes from persons having a considerable experience with photographs in a particular field – such as advertising or news – or from an individual having wide historical knowledge of photographs.

Neutral Responses

If a photographer consistently inspires a neutral response, then he should seriously consider some other form of self-expression – or find another group of persons for his audience. The neutral response indicates that communication is not taking place.

Literal Description

In this response, the individual either describes a photograph part by part or stops with the identification of objects. For such persons, identification usually ends the experience of a photograph. The person who counts objects in a photograph frequently fails to observe the relationships. Once a photograph has been “pigeonholed” in this manner, the door to further exploration of the photograph is closed. Literal description indicates that communication has not taken place between a photographer and his audience. The viewer, who has this response to a photograph, has only seen what he can or wants to see.

Technical Analysis

Technical analysis, like “literal description,” indicates a lack of communication between a photographer and his audience. Technical discussion avoids the necessity of “making contact” with what the photograph reports or evokes. Bluffers sometimes resort to this.

Description Of Graphic Design

This response generally comes from persons who have had art and design training, and it can be an avoidance of the pertinent meanings of a photograph as much as can a literal or technical description. On the other hand, some photographs offer little more than graphic design to an audience. In such cases, a discussion of design and composition is pertinent and appropriate. To some persons, pure form is as meaningful and emotional as significant form is to others. Responses in this category are always useful to the photographer because they are informational.

The Historical Viewpoint

Seeing the photograph in question against other photographs may or may not be a neutral response. It is neutral if comparisons are made on an intellectual level to the exclusion of the emotional level or if the comparisons are a way of avoiding the humanistic statement of the photograph in question.

Pertinent Responses

Profound and effective involvements with photographs lead to pertinent responses. This kind of response goes beyond rejection and superficial visual conversations with photographs. The viewer who makes “a pertinent response” finds some kind of symbol of his own personal experience in the photograph and relates himself to it. “The Pertinent Response” pertains to both the photograph and the viewer. It can be on the physical, emotional, associational, or intellectual level. It can also be on more than one level.

The “tangibles,” such as tone values, composition, design relationships and the various photographic concepts are relevant. They are the only safe and secure ground upon which verbalizing can take place. But, because people also respond to the intangible qualities of a photograph, they are also a part of the pertinent response.

The actual nature, of most pertinent responses, escapes either verbalization or visualizing by gesture or sketches. Therefore, about all the photographer can hope for, are clues to the fact that the individual is experiencing the photograph.

Clues To Image Involvement

There are various clues which indicate that the viewer is "meaningfully involved" with the image.

(1) Tactile sensations may be derived from the photograph.

(2) The image is "converted" into signs and symbols.

(3) The viewer "anthropomorphizes" and projects faces or human characteristics to the image.

(4) Design, concepts, or composition are related to the subject and to feelings. The viewer starts "relating" – "this design does so and so and makes me feel this way."

(5) Subjects are invented when the photograph is ambiguous and the subject cannot be identified.

(6) The photograph serves as a "mirror" of the viewer's self or the viewer may make personal projections (kinesthetic or physical). When this happens, something is going on but it can be irrelevant as far as the photograph is concerned. But, projection into the photographer's experience – and/or personality – means a pretty objective response.

(7) A photograph may be put in relation to some other experience or feeling. This may indicate a thorough comprehension of the picture or it may indicate a superficial level of understanding.

Sense Of Presence

When the spectator relates the subject of a photograph to its surroundings, he is beginning to have a response with the picture. He is beginning to get involved with it. Responses require a curiosity, on the part of the spectator, as to what is behind a picture – a curiosity as to: when, where, and how it was taken – or a discussion of the mood of the place, event, or the individual. These curiosities, on the part of the spectator, indicate an involvement with the photograph and therefore some response.

The spectator may feel that he is “in the presence” of some place, person, event, or mystery. Sometimes, “the feeling of presence” takes the form of speculating on how the photographer felt while he was “in the presence” of a place or an event. In other cases, tactile sensations are aroused by the photograph, and the response can be related to the tactile imagery that the photograph evokes. For example, the textures seen in a photograph of bark or sand may arouse the appropriate sensations in the hands of the viewer.

Deduction From Visible Clues

Two broad classes of photographs can be set up: those pictures that transform the subject – and those which represent recognizable subject matter. Some “factual” photographs ask questions, which the viewer can answer from the information provided in the photograph. When this happens, the viewer may attempt to sort out the implications of the photographic facts. The viewer has to “engage” the photograph in order to locate an answer, and so an interchange takes place between the viewer and the photographic illusion of subjects and their relationships. The viewer of the photograph may wonder: Who lived in this house? Or, What kind of person lives behind this face?

Recognition Of An Immediate Symbolism

The identification of standard symbols, when they occur in a photograph, indicates a relevant and pertinent response. A photograph may depend on a long established symbol, but sometimes it will function as a new statement of a universal feeling.

Conversion Into Signs And Symbols

Conversion into signs and symbols bring involvement – not with the object but with the symbol of the object. If the symbol is not merely a cliché, there can be real involvement. Otherwise, these tend to be standardized responses.

Anthropomorphizing

The projection of human characteristics to an image can be irrelevant. However, one must engage a photograph long enough to do it. Anthropomorphizing indicates that a response is happening.

Anthropomorphizing occurs when we see faces in rocks or parking meters, and when people project such human qualities as courage, anger, love, hope, or spirit, etc. The anthropomorphized forms rarely match the feeling evoked by the rest of the picture. Generally, they bear a relation to the viewer's own personality. This response is common when the subject of a photograph is ambiguous or cannot be identified.

The Photograph As A Source Of Experience

In the extreme case, where the original subject has been completely transformed, the viewer has to invent his own subject for it – or else be able to respond to pure form for its own sake. The viewer may anthropomorphize, thereby making kinesthetic and physical projections into the photograph; respond to the photograph as though it were a memory trigger for immediate associations; use the photograph as a mirror of the self; or use the photograph to project into the photographer's experience and/or personality. These responses indicate that something is going on, but they can be irrelevant as far as the photograph is concerned. They can also be thorough and objective responses.

Exploration Of The Mirror Nature Of Photographs

Any response is a projection of the inner self to some degree. The viewer, who has the curiosity to explore "the mirror nature" of photographs, can use the photograph to see a manifestation of his own inner workings. The photographer must have a considerable knowledge of both himself and other people before he will be able to distinguish between an abnormal psychological response, and a response, which reveals something pertinent about the viewer and the photograph.

Responses As If The Photograph Were An Equivalent

When the viewer becomes aware that the image directs his attention outwardly into the world, he may experience a relationship of himself to the universe. The photographer may not be able to see even a clue to the experience.

Intellectual Responses

An intellectual response means that there is an intellectual process functioning in the mind of the viewer. If you look at a photograph and are made instantly aware of the composition, size, and shape relationships, the photograph may in effect be suggesting that this is the way you should look at it. When this is so, one could attempt to respond to it on an intellectual level.

Evaluation Of Responses

To communicate feelings with photography, it is necessary to first know something about the photograph. A photograph must be understood before it can be put in relation to some other experience or feeling. Without understanding, we cannot intelligently use photographs in various contexts and for various purposes. How can a photograph function as an Equivalent for a particular poem – or as an advertisement for a product – if the "idea-feeling" is not the same?

If the photographer's response indicates that certain feelings are present, others may be able to respond similarly. It is important to understand "how a photograph makes us feel" in order to understand how it will affect others, and it is important to know something about the individual who is going to see a particular photograph. A knowledgeable photographer should know the scope of what he can do with a photograph and when to use a particular type of photograph. Non-objective photographs, for example, can set off free associations that the spectator may want to repress because they are painful for one reason or another. Thus, a photograph can lead the audience into areas that they don't want to see.

The Study Of One's Own Photographs

If the photographer studies his own photograph, until he has seen everything present, he is in a better position to predict the possible responses of other people. The potentials within the photograph include: facts, relationships, "What The Photograph Reminds You Of" and the whole range of where the image reaches you. That is to say, whether the response is through the intellect, the emotions, or physical sensations.

The photographer can isolate additional features of the photograph for study with drawn overlays. The two dimensional surface of any photograph has certain large space divisions which are caused by the distribution of light and dark tones. These "main divisions" can be drawn on a piece of transparent paper laid over the photograph. The overlay should then be taken off and studied independently of the photograph. Separate overlays can be made for still other patterns, as for example, the pattern formed by the blacks and dark values treated together, the separate patterns that are created by isolating the middle gray values or the light values, or the textural distribution. (This procedure is equally valuable to any viewer who is trying to understand a photograph. And, it can be incorporated into an Active Analysis of a photograph.)

The photographer (or viewer of a photograph), in studying and responding to these isolated aspects of the photograph, should allow the drawn overlays to touch his suggestibility, his sensations, his intellect, and his emotions, singly or all together. At times, the responses will be the same as those, which were aroused by the photograph as a whole – sometimes entirely different feelings will appear.

Collation Of The Photographer's Experiences

By the study of sketches and overlays, the photographer (or viewer) can come up with a large number of associative, emotional, kinesthetic, and intellectual responses to himself. And, no matter how strange, irrelevant, or alike the responses may be; they should be converted into words or sketches. New responses are then added to the list made from the photograph itself.

This kind of extension is useful, because no matter how "way out" a response may seem to the photographer, it is probable that some viewer will have the same response to the photograph. By arming himself with a long list of possible responses, the photographer is in a position to say that he can predict the responses of a group of people – although not of individual people.

Prediction Of Visual Experience

The photographer can both control and predict the visual experience of the viewer insofar as he can evoke "known feeling states" in other people. He can create a photograph that appeals predominantly to the emotional, intellectual, or the kinesthetic-tactile side of the audience; but he has no assurance that other people will be able to experience his photograph fully. Even if the photograph corresponds to an "idea-feeling" that the viewer of the photograph has experienced, certain blocks may occur which prevent any understanding of the image.

Nevertheless, advanced creativity in photography lies in affecting changes in the inner state of the viewer's mind by means of the photographic image. These changes are predictable to the extent that: the photographer comprehends the photograph fully, understands his own response, and understands the nature of the picture audience.

Evaluation Of Photographs

A photograph creates a mental image within a person, which in turn leads to change (or metamorphosis). Evaluation is the act of deciding whether a photographic image depletes or nourishes in the process of producing this change. If the photograph "nourishes," it is good. If it "depletes" or takes away, it is bad.

Nourishing photographs are always exciting and moving. They produce a change of psychological state towards power, floating, warmth, love, or euphoria. Depleting photographs create such overwhelmingly negative reactions as: fear, anger, annoyance, conflict, pride, or vanity.

A good photograph evokes responses rather than reactions within the viewer. It is a photograph, which makes appropriate use of the image, and nourishes rather than depletes. The photographer who is capable of creating this kind of an image is able to respond to the world around him and able to make an audience respond. He must bear responsibility to himself, to his medium, and to his audience. Likewise, an audience that is a good or creative one must bear responsibility to itself, to the medium, and to the photographer. It should make an effort to respond to a photograph rather than to react.

Last Words

With your interest in understanding a visual image, you have started on a journey that can last a lifetime. How far you travel down this path will depend on many things – but it will mostly depend on how far you wish to go. In my own case, I started on this journey when I was a young child. I stood before a painting by Picasso and I felt frustrated – frustrated because I was unable to understand what it was that I was looking at. The frustration that I felt led me to begin a lifetime of searching for ways to better understand a picture. For me, that frustration nearly became an obsession. I began to collect as many books and magazine articles that I could find pertaining to the subject. In the late 1950's, I studied visual communication and how to read pictures with Ralph Hattersley and Minor White at the Rochester Institute of Technology. And, it was here that Charlie Arnold taught me the principles of design. After graduation, I kept in touch with my "mentors" for the remainder of their lives.

The language of vision is perhaps the most powerful language that there is. It is every bit as important as the verbal language. Learning the language of vision will contribute a great deal to your life because we are surrounded by visual images. If you decide that you wish to follow this path, I would welcome you to join me and I would welcome your companionship.

Exercises

Exercise For The Passive Method

Select a photograph or an object which you like. Try to be super-aware of the process. Place the photograph or object in a good light and be seated squarely and comfortably in front of it. Direct all of your energy toward the eyes and perception. Until this moment, the eyes should remain closed.

Preliminary Contact – As you open your eyes, you can expect to see that the object has apparently changed in some way. What happens does not make very much difference. The important clue is that some kind of change occurs. You will see it occur in the object or photograph, although obviously it does not change. Hence, the change is in yourself, meaning that some degree of "heightened awareness" is present.

Write Up – After performing the exercise, turn away from the image. From memory, sub-vocally talk the various experiences undergone during the process of relaxation, anticipation, and contact. When the internal talk is done, write out the recalled experience in detail without looking at the image again. Give most of the attention to the process. What does relaxing feel like? What are the sensations as anticipation is directed towards the eyes? What is the feeling that lets you know that you are in a state of "heightened awareness"? Describe in detail whatever seemed like a preliminary contact. Sometimes, it is rewarding to refer back to the image after the report is done.

Repeat this exercise with several kinds of subjects, including more photographs. Always stop within a two-minute time limit. Write up each experience before starting a new one. Be sure to leave plenty of time between contacts. Come to the exercise as fresh as possible each time.

Summary Of Steps To Aid Memory

(1) Preparation – Relaxation
(2) Anticipation
(3) Eyes Open
(4) Preliminary Contact
(5) Write – From Memory

Exercise #2 – Sustained Contact And Interruption

Select a fairly large object, or a photograph of one, with strong textures, clearly defined edges, obviously hard or soft surfaces, or any combination of these features.

Prepare yourself carefully and prepare contact. When you make contact, keep your eyes moving around – back and forth – over the object or photograph.

To sustain a state of "heightened awareness," invite your hands into the act. This can be done easily. Encourage one hand or the other to explore some edge, or surface texture, whichever you wish.

To sustain contact, let the eyes lead your hand around the object, through it, over, under, between. Move the eyes slowly; otherwise the hand will seem to lose its empathetic contact.

After several minutes, when you think that your hands, or some other part of your body, have sampled the textures, surfaces, or edges, bring the sensations to a slow halt. Quietly turn away from the object. Remember the experience from start to finish, in a tactile way at first, then visually, and last externalize with words. Write out the experience from memory. So doing will make the report less than a replica of the inner experience, but will help to keep the experience visual. Keep the vocalizing and writing something to be done afterwards from memory.

If there are interruptions, proceed again. If there are annoying distractions, concentrate harder. If you should lose contact, start over. Even a very slight degree of tactile sensation in the hand is significant.

Sooner or later, you will be able to sustain the inter-connections between sight and touch. After you have found your life richer because of this awareness, begin to explore other connections such as "Sight And Sound," "Sight And Taste," "Sight And Smell," "Sight And Insight." Some of these empathetic connections may arise of their own accord.

Summary

(1) Preparation And Contact
(2) Sense With Hand But Do Not Touch
(3) Sense With Other Hand
(4) Slow Halt
(5) Remember Tactile, Visual, Verbal Awareness
(6) Write – Up From Memory

Exercise #3 – Turning Off

Conscious effort is not always required to either start or terminate a period of contact. Things, which fascinate us, can induce a state of “seeing” in spite of ourselves. There are definite steps for making the coming out of “heightened awareness a positive willful act.

(1) Take a last impression.
(2) Forget the image.
(3) Consciously let the body return to its familiar sense of weight.
(4) Allow the body to start to move in its habitual fashion.
(5) To forget the image, close your eyes or look elsewhere.

Specifically practice the exercise by making contact with something you have chosen to work with. Turn off the “seeing state” emphatically according to the steps given above. Rest a moment and then repeat this turning on and off process two or three times. Then, make a deliberate halt – even though you may feel that you have not been very deeply involved with the subject. The point of the exercise is an act of will. Verbalize your own experience before writing out your observations.

Summary

(1) Preparation And Contact
(2) Last Impression
(3) Forget Image
(4) Body Returns To Normal
(5) Repeat From Step #1 Several Times
(6) Verbalize The Experience
(7) Write – Up From Memory

On The Value Of Exercises

In Eugene Herrigel’s book, **Zen and the Art of Archery**, Herrigel describes how he learned archery from a Japanese Zen Master. At first, there were lessons on how to breathe and how to hold the bow but there was no target. For many months, while the Zen master’s students learned how to release the arrow effortlessly, there was no target. A target was put up only after the process was learned. The analogy can be made to hold in photography.

Learning the process is aided immensely, if the early exercises are done without regard for the so-called success of the picture! In fact, looking for pictures is generally a good way of missing the opportunities for pictures. The search for photographs blocks us from seeing the livingness of the "subject-object."

Exercise #4 – Subject Essence

Select a simple object with a simple background for this exercise. An old object would make an excellent choice because old objects generally have personality or character.

Meditate on what the subject's "essence" or essential character is. Then, photograph the subject using a digital camera if possible. Maintain this "seeing state" while you photograph the subject. Look at the photograph carefully and see if it has transformed the subject or if it shows the subject accurately.

First, write down what you perceived as you photographed the subject. And then, write down what you feel the photograph evokes in you. Are the feelings produced by the subject and the photograph the same or are they different? If they are different, why do you feel that this change took place?

What you selected to photograph will affect this entire exercise. You will be better able to observe the process, involved in this exercise, if you work with a subject that interests you mildly rather than a dramatic one that leaves you "gasping for breath" – or one that you dislike. At this stage, strong emotions will overwhelm your powers to observe. Unless the subject that you work with is only of mild interest, it will not be possible for you to observe it very well since you will become lost in the process.

It is important to hold contact with the subject, before, during, and after exposure with extraordinary attention. Memorize the sense, the feeling, the thoughts, and your intuition of the subject-object scene so well that seeing the photograph will help bring you back to this same place in yourself.

In this exercise, write down the sense and feeling, knowledge, and intuition of the subject. Use whatever words you can muster – spontaneous poetry will serve best. Later, this kind of private vocalizing can be a trigger, for use while printing, to carry over these feelings into the print – so that the picture audience can experience these feelings later.

When a photographer makes a print, he should try to relive the experience that was uppermost at the time of exposure. Heightened awareness and recall will help you to produce prints that truly satisfy the remembered experience.

If you read one of your photographs, and it does not evoke the same feeling that you experienced when the photograph was made – or, if it does not seem to evoke "The Essential Nature Of The Subject" – it may be because you "projected" something onto the scene.

This is one of the greatest sources of disappointment in photography. The subject-object was not really understood; instead it served as a target that triggered purely personal association. These associations or reminders will be so strong that the photographer literally sees the subject wrong.

Sketches

You have been writing reports, from memory, of your various experiences with objects and photographs. The same kind of reports can be done with sketches. You will know what your sketches stand for. It is only when working with other people, that a few words with a sketch will clarify your meaning.

How Much Of A Visual Experience Should Be Sketched

Literal renderings take too long – the visual note rarely requires more than a minute or two. The spontaneous reminder (or sketch) frees you of fussy detail, and hence sketching may free you of some of your inhibitions. Watch and see if such freedom happens in yourself. Also, visually oriented people welcome a substitution of sketches for words – when recalling or describing a visual experience.

Four Exercises

The significant problem, central to this group of exercises, is an awareness of the differentiation between "I" and "It." What do we project of ourselves onto the subject? How does this differ from the essential qualities of it? What qualities do you find peculiar to the object, scene, or subject matter of the photograph? And, can we learn to let the object, scene, or photograph project its qualities on us? The task of differentiating "I" from "It" can be approached much more easily with sketches than with camera.

The Imitation Sketch

Make contact and experience some subject-object – in this case preferably not an image. Turn off contact, and without looking at the object from memory. Sketch the experience. Sketch what you saw. Try not to "vocalize" as you sketch. Let your impulse, which gives form to your experience; come from your body or heart – if possible. Notice whether your sketch is literal or metaphorical.

The Self Sketch

This sketch deals with "projections" and "personality." Select some subject or photograph (other than one of your own). Enjoy the "seeing" of it. At the end, instead of writing, sketch all the important events that happened to you. Try not to "sub-vocalize" as you sketch. Avoid representative renderings if possible. Sketch only your projections of yourself onto the object.

We all project something of ourselves, on everything, all the time. We see what we want to see, and usually at the expense of the person, object, or place. This exercise is intended to help us see what it is that we project.

The problem in this exercise is to keep from a literal or imitation sketch. Keep in mind that what you project onto the object only rarely resembles the "eyeball" or camera eye version of the thing. This exercise aims to help you understand, that what you project is a property of yourself and does not belong to the object. Write up your observations and discoveries.

Essence Sketch

Return to the same object for this exercise as for the Self-Sketch. Re-experience the object in "A State Of Heightened Awareness." If this proves distressing, select a new object and make both a "Self" and an "Essence" sketch of it. The point of this exercise is to somehow reach the inner reality of the object that lives or hides beneath the surface. Aim to reach the essence that properly belongs to the object – not some part of yourself.

The point of the Essence Sketch is to manifest an inner, more fundamental form; the objective (though intangible) uniqueness of the object. This should be repeated several times with other subjects. For example, select a few related objects or a fairly complex picture and explore, in contact, the relationships within the image.

Coreform Sketch

The idea of coreform is a frank recognition that in any interchange between humans, or between a human being and a non-human subject, there is a blend and an interweaving of forces and resistances. The literal minded person sees only one half of the reality and so must push himself to see and acknowledge the other half – the essence both in himself and the object.

Again, use the same object as for the Self-Sketch. Or, if for some reason that is impossible, find a new object or photograph – but not one that you made. Make a Self-Sketch and an Essence Sketch before attempting the Coreform Sketch.

As usual, “make contact” – and if possible make the sketches from memory. A Coreform Sketch should be done without hesitation from the heart or viscera, and in a few large strokes. As you write up the experience, give extraordinary attention to the possible meaning of coreform, its potentials and implications.

Summary Of The Four Exercises

Imitation Sketch: Work with any object or photograph in contact, from memory, sketch what you saw.

Self-Sketch: Work “in resonance” with an object or with someone else’s photograph. From memory, sketch your projections onto the object. The drawing is not likely to be representational of the object.

Essence Sketch: Work “in resonance” with the same object or photograph used in the Self-Sketch. From memory, sketch the inner being.

Coreform Sketch: Work “in resonance” with the same item used in the Self-Sketch. From memory, sketch in a few strokes your vision of a coreform.

Active Contact And Review In Reverse Expanded Seeing Exercise

Select a photograph that seems to offer you room to walk, move in, swim, fly or float in – such as a street, interior, garden, or space. Once contact is made, empathetically involve not only your hands but also other regions of your body – if appropriate. Let correspondences grow throughout your whole body, if that seems the thing to do, in any way that happens. Let things grow and occur in your emotions seemingly of their own accord. Let the body itself decide what to experience. Let the mind be active if that seems appropriate. Function as a total human being. Refrain from anticipating that anything can or will happen.

If at any time you notice a tendency to drift out of contact, or an urge to deliberate, “turn off” at once, and after a moment or two turn on again. When you are fully ready to terminate the experience, take a last impression and turn off consciously. Look away, turn around or otherwise keep the picture out of sight during recall.

After you disengage yourself from direct experience of the image or object, enter, so to speak, “a recall phase.” Gather your forces again to visually and empathetically recall it in reverse of the chronological order in which the experience took place. Start with the last impression and proceed backwards to the first impression.

Recall the experience as if running a film backwards. Or, think of walking up a street, turning around, and walking back to the starting point. The view will probably be different. When you write up the return trip, notice whether you proceeded backward in a straight line as reversing a film, or “leap-frogged” back.

Include, in the write-up, your observations on the differences between a linear progression in time forwards and the progression backwards. What is the difference between a forward reliving in recall and a reversed re-experiencing of the trip? Finally, write out your observation about the concept of recall as a working state.

Passive Contact Exercise

Passive contact, with an image, is at least as valuable as active contact, perhaps more so. Work “in contact” with an image and sustain the awareness simply by “Listening In Utter Silence And Stillness For The Image To Speak.” This is a special form of listening that is directly connected to seeing. It is felt by some to be a “Listening With The Eyes.” so, keep out the usual sounds and “Maintain A Space Of Silence.” Be patient, when the image speaks, it will do so in your own language. Passivity – letting it happen – is different than actively forcing contact. It is being a mirror with a memory. The passive approach, at certain times will be the only way to reach the meaning of an image.

Write briefly your observation on the concept of working in a passive state of heightened awareness. What does this kind of experience do for you?

Total Analysis

To experience and understand an image, you should bring to bear all that you have become conscious of – since starting to apply heightened awareness to photography.

Be exhaustive – give special attention to what you project and what you mirror. Many questions should arise. You can expect some answers to be found in the photograph itself, but the answers to others can be found only in yourself. Some of the questions rose out of yourself, not out of the photograph, will be irrelevant and should be squelched.

Some Of The Questions To Be Considered When Experiencing A Photograph

(1) Was the photographer totally present when he made the exposure?
(2) What is his presence like in the picture if he is present at all?
(3) What is the tactile event of this picture for you?
(4) How does your mind deal with the composition?
(5) How does the craftsman think about it?
(6) What vision does the photographer have?
(7) What associations are aroused of other personal events?
(8) When does it stand historically?

These questions should be met and understood in a state of "heightened awareness" – either with the image directly, or from memory and recall. There is something new to seek and find – and it is the presence of the photographer in the picture. Can you envision the maker in the photograph? A photograph may be the result of an urgency, which when present in the photographer, finds many ways to mirror itself in the visual world. Such themes, once sensed, can be materialized and completed in a short time. As usual, write out the experience and your conclusions regarding the process.

Total Experience And Total Analysis Exercise

Select a photograph where the design is appropriate, and one which you like. Experience it totally. Work with it in a state of concentration and work with it further in recall. Bring to these working periods every bit of background information you can muster. Recall what you experienced while taking it. Think about how design, technique, graphics, subject, and visual functions relate to meaning.

Tabulate in key words, or phrases, your entire experience with the photograph both during and after recall. Determine for yourself what the visual functions add to the meaning of the photograph. Look at the photograph again to analyze and write about it. Let the writing itself add to your understanding of the image.

Now, stretch your imagination and make all possible connections between the various relationships within the image. Using a large sketchpad sheet, tabulate all the information. Notice how you get to the same comprehension from various entry points.

Next, make some sketches; preferably separate overlays on transparent paper. Make sketches of the dark areas, the middle gray areas, and the light areas. Outline each area pattern and shade it in lightly so that the shape is clear. Study each overlay as if it were an independent visual experience.
Ask yourself what these sketches remind you of. What mental associations are triggered within you by the form of the outlined areas? Tabulate this in words and phrases for each separate overlay as a separate experience. When that is done, look back to the photograph and try to see whether or not you can see in the photograph what has been spotlighted in the sketch. You may or may not, but in any case tabulate everything.

The objective here is to know so much about the photograph – that nothing people say about it will be new to you. Still, you may be surprised.

Verbal Association Exercise

A photograph is displayed for the usual length of time. Afterwards, no words but sketches of responses are attempted. When a single line, a couple of lines, or a whole scramble is done quickly – such as in a matter of seconds – excitements start. Once started, things may naturally open up. Compare the sketches. Some will obviously relate, but others will be obscure. A feeling of pleasure will accompany the successful ones.

Words are added to the obscure sketches, in an attempt to clarify the connection to the photograph. Next, words are added to all of the sketches in order to start the mind off in new directions. This exercise will help the viewer make additional discoveries about the connections of the visual to contactful talk.

Multiple Images

When images are placed side by side, our minds are affected in various ways. Because of our constant “projection,” we very readily see images change as other images are brought beside them – and then replaced with still another image. So the study of visual literacy is to become aware of the effect that images have upon us – whether they are single images, images in sequence, or images in a story or layout. Notice how the images affect your actions, reactions, and responses.

Some photographers want to be able to make a visual statement with two or more images that when seen together make a statement that neither image can make alone. An interesting transference of ownership occurs in creative picture editing. The statement that emerges from a new juxtaposition of images belongs to the person who selects and juxtaposes or edits the images.

An analogy can be made to literature here. Individual photographs are words, small groups of photographs are paragraphs or chapters, the “Sequence” is the novel or epic poem; and the experience of images in sequence is a form of reading pictures. Some photographs are nouns or things, verbs (or actions), adjectives, adverbs -- and even punctuation. Some images are periods – others are explanation points.

While the analogy to words only suggests something partial, the comparison to reading Chinese characters (ideographs) hits the mark since the ideographs are “multivalent” and require intuition to connect the meanings. So far as the photograph is multivalent, or holds many meanings, intuition is required to discover the right meaning in the context of other images. Intuition is required to put images into context with each other.

Exercise With A Sequence

With either photographs or reproductions, put together a “Sequence” to make a creative visual statement. Write down what the statement is. Change the statement deliberately by changing the images. Once again, write down what the statement is. Compare the statements with those of other people to see if they obtained a similar response to the images. Discuss why the images produced the responses that they did.

Effect Of Images On Images Exercise

Find a clipping or a photograph, preferably of a face that has no distinct emotional cast such as an obvious smile, for example. Place other illustrations beside it, one at a time, and observe what happens to the face in this primary image or noun photograph. Does the expression change? Does the modifying photograph satisfy or explain what the person is looking at? Or, does the modifying photograph seem to cause a change of expression without observable reason? When you have found a modifier that causes an apparent change, set that one aside. Go through the clippings again – to find other modifiers that cause a different change in the “noun” photograph. Perhaps you will be able to find three or four or a half dozen photographs which affect the first one in a slight but noticeable way. If it seems that nothing happens to the original photograph, pick another. When changes do occur, they do so whether the graphic connections are weak, strong, or missing. Try this exercise with other types of images, especially so-called abstract forms.

Effect Of Words On Images Exercise

Find a clipping or photograph for the prime objective (noun). Write words or phrases on separate slips of paper. Almost any words thought up at random will do – let your imagination go free. Words that are descriptive sometimes work, but sometimes they do not work well. Think up words, phrases, whole sentences thoughtlessly. Lay the picture on a table. Place slips of paper – beside or under the picture one at a time. You can anticipate, that now and then a combination will appear, that unexpectedly connects with a jolt. Both contribute to a statement that neither can make alone. In both of these image modifying exercises, watch for that moment in yourself when the prime image changes. It is a remarkable moment.

A Method For Putting Together A Sequence

One useful method of putting together a Sequence is to isolate the opening photograph and the terminal photograph – and then fill in between. In a way, locating this first and last photograph sets a question. Filling in between is the answer to that question.

Another method, is to gather up all of the photographs that seem to be related to something. Pull out those about which you have absolutely no question as belonging to the potential Sequence. Arrange those into a left to right reading order. If you have been fortunate, this small group of maybe half a dozen will constitute the essence of the Sequence – the essential framework or skeleton. Next, begin to add connectives – put some meat on the bones. During the additive period, encourage phrases to develop. When the structure of the Sequence unfolds, you may realize that certain pictures are missing – you do not have them in your collection of photographs even though you look. So, you find and make the photographs to fit precisely in some gap in this growing Sequence.

The creative, or psychological structure of a Sequence (coreform) may be experienced as a total entity – and all at once – even though the Sequence may not be completed for many months. Once the subjective “coreform” is grasped, one can work quite objectively to complete and polish the Sequence – in order to make it understandable to an audience.

If you find that a Sequence develops out of material, which you already have, it will probably be necessary to reprint the pictures and remount. This will give a unification of the mount sizes, but more important it will give a graphic and visual connective in terms of print contrast. This can only be acquired by printing the Sequence afresh – beginning with photo number one and progressing to the end.

When printing a Sequence, each negative will be influenced by the juxtaposition of images. More than likely, each print will be quite different in contrast, size, and cropping from what is “right” for it alone.

To keep a contact print of each negative one a file card, allows manipulation of the file cards and facilitates the forming of sequences. To make a preliminary working set of mounted pictures – to size, cropping, and print contrast – allows plans to develop for further refinements.

The meaning of each individual image will come to be less than the meaning of the Sequence. Each photograph then contributes in relation to its place in the series. Each has a fitting place for building up to a climax. Generally, a Sequence falls into “phrases.” Each phrase has its internal structure and each phrase builds to the ultimate climax and overall meaning.

In forming a Sequence, the bare bones of the structure should be obvious to you – but invisible to anyone else – unless that person studies the Sequence to see how it has been structured.

Building A Sequence From Scratch

A photographic Sequence can be built from scratch. Photographs are made at random – out of some sense of compulsion. The story is found afterwards. Or, plan as carefully as possible and then go to work. If tension builds up because some new marvelous material, which may even be better, makes a shambles of the plan – let yourself go with the material as it is given to you. Treat the plan as setting the question and the material you find as answering that question. The answer may be devious and unknown until you see it.

A visual connection can be made when there is a shape relationship between two images. Images have effects upon one another and thereby take on a different meaning than when they stand alone. Images, which stand alone, do not cause us to make connections. When images are seen together, they take on connections. When we make these connections, it is as though we take the meaning of each and blend them in some way. How we make that blend is generally quite personal. The subject matter of a Sequence is not what is visibly rendered. Meaning is derived from the implications of design and the associations caused by the symbols.

There are various ways in which images can be made to relate to one another. Look for similar forms – a line of one subject in a picture can appear to extend into another subject in another picture. Rounded forms and harmonizing colors might relate between two pictures. There might be a long white line and whitish colors in two images. The textural sizes of things can also hold images together.

There might be a verbal connection that might apply to both images, for example, the harvest of wheat and ocean harvest. These verbal connections are very useful.

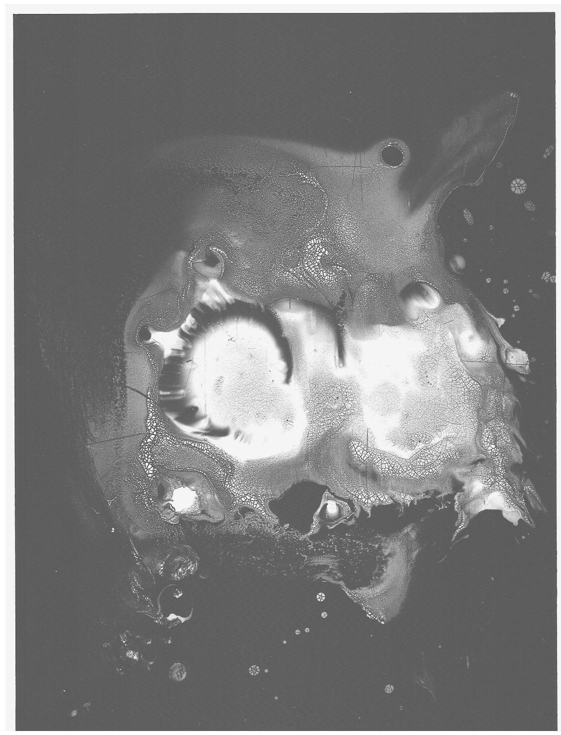
Realism may be stretched but it should not be broken. Abstractions must not leave the world of appearances for to do so is to break the camera's strongest point – its authenticity.

Visual Into Movement Exercise

Convert a slide or photograph into movement with hands or body that would describe how you feel or how you sense the image. Do not try to make imitation movements.

We can communicate to other people through movement. This can be done on the back of someone's hands to denote what we feel with movements. Photography can communicate non-verbally and through the tactile sense of touch and contact communication.

Express in a tactile way your feeling or sensation from these images. Draw shapes with your hand or "beat out" some kind of a rhythm. Then, tap it out on the back of someone in front of you until they experience your feeling or sensation. Finally, tell someone what you experienced.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

This photograph, which resembles an alien life form in the cosmos, is in reality an expression of the photographer's unconscious desire to explore new creative directions in his work. It is an example of: "Things For What Else They Are."

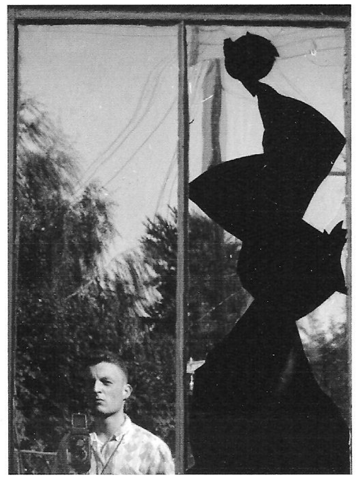


Example of a "Pictorial" photograph



Breakthrough To Joy

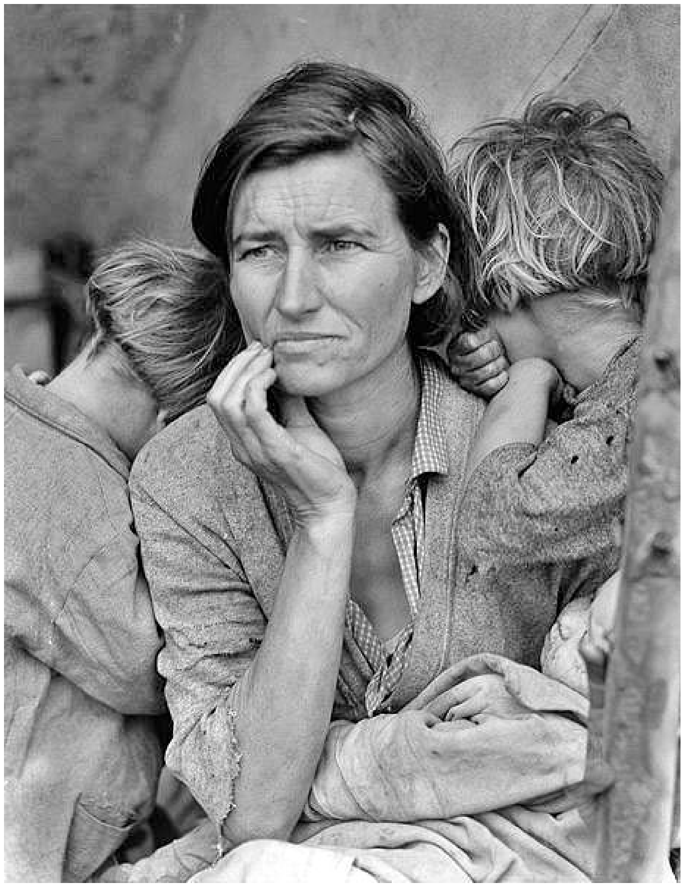
This photograph reveals the essential nature (or essence) of the subject. The title serves to show the feelings that the photograph evoked within me. It uses the connotation of words to reinforce those feelings.



This photograph is a self-portrait. What psychological suggestions do the elements surrounding the subject suggest to you? What clues might they provide about this person?



This documentary photograph shows the subject in her surroundings. What do the various objects in the picture tell you about this person? If a caption accompanied the picture, it could tell us whom or what we are looking at – as well as when or where the picture was taken.



Photograph by Dorothea Lange titled: "Migrant Mother"
Courtesy U.S. Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division

In the 1930's, the Farm Security Division employed several photographers to document the effects of the Great Depression on the population of America. This was one of many photographs created by that endeavor.

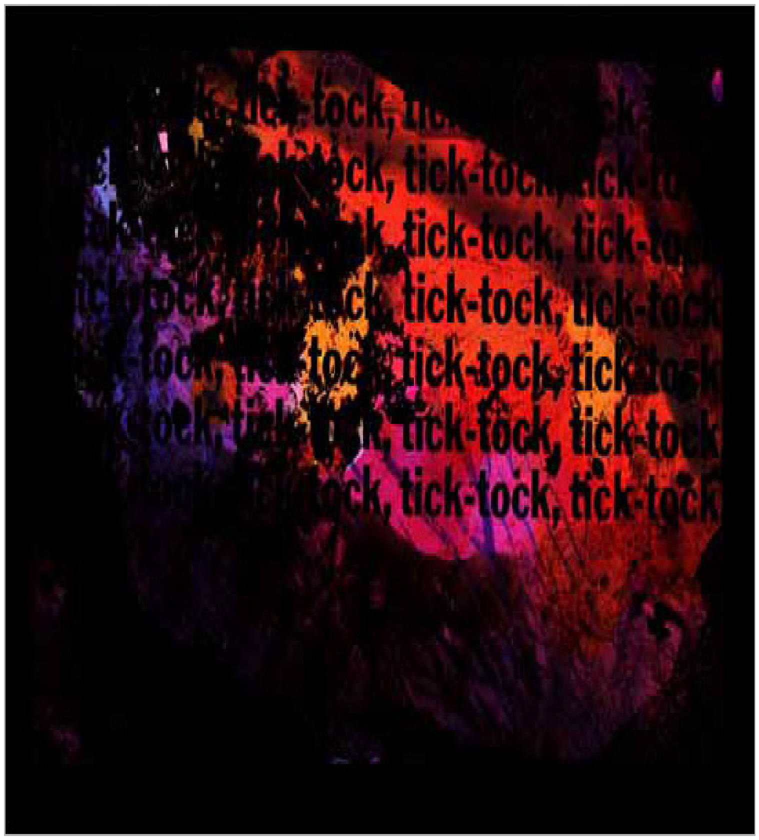
The caption of the photograph read: "Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children, Age thirty-two, Nipomo, California."

We can feel the worry and concern of the subject in this photograph because of her facial expression, the placement of her hand, and the compositional arrangement of her and her children.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

What does this photograph remind you of? Since this non-literal picture lacks a title, the viewer must rely upon personal associations to gain insight as to what the picture might express. Then, these associations must be verified by the design elements, the various concepts, and the possible meanings of the various symbols in the picture. Does it help you to know that it is part of the photographer's "Landscapes Of Outer Space" series and that the photograph's title is: Shaula-X. Now, where do your associations lead you?



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Words can influence the associations that we derive from a picture. Sometimes, a title may be used – at other times words can be used as “additive” captions within the photograph itself.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Psych-Head – Self Portrait

The title of the photograph leads you to believe that the picture expresses something about the psyche of the photographer. If the picture did not have a title, your associations could take you in any direction.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

If you have difficulty understanding what an abstract picture expresses, you might try “Topsy-Turvy Looking.” By turning an abstract picture “upside down,” or on its side, it is possible to coax additional associations out of it. Ask yourself: what does the picture seem to suggest if viewed in this way? Is it similar to or different than what the image seems to suggest when it is viewed correctly?
In what way or ways does the picture seem to change when it is looked at in this way?



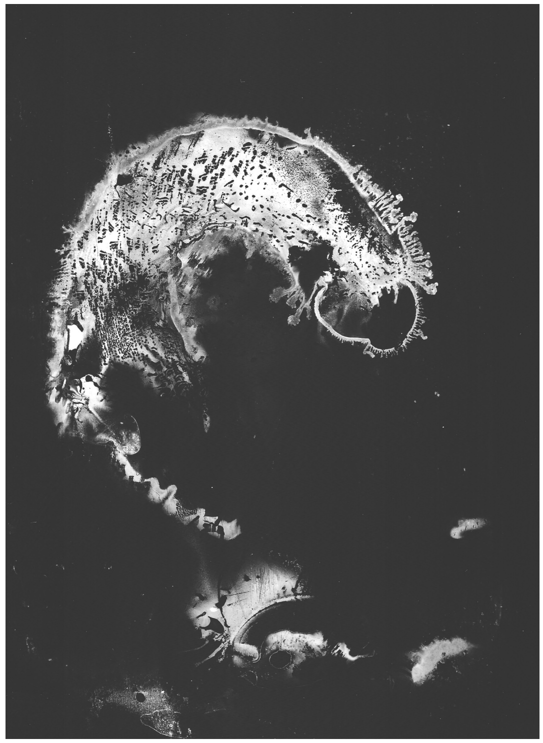
Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

In this photograph, two creatures that resemble tortoises have something unknown pressing upon them from above. The shells of the creatures may symbolize limitation. The substance that is pressing down upon them from above could symbolize stagnation. The dark environment, may symbolize depression. The tortoise can be a symbol of longevity or fecundity. And, the tortoise might be a metaphorical symbol for man. Water can be a symbol of the subconscious mind.

Could the photographer be attempting to say: When we allow ourselves to become creatures, bound by our limitations, that depression and gloom may take hold of our subconscious mind?

We have determined what the important symbols are, how they relate to other symbols in the photograph, their context within the picture, and what actions or feelings they evoke from the other subjects.

This method of working with symbols is called Symbol Amplification and it is a useful way to approach pictures in order to better understand them.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

This photograph is from the series: Landscapes Of Outer Space. It's title is: Arcturusv-ii. Using Symbol Amplification, What associations does this picture evoke within you? What does the picture remind you of?

Determine what the important symbols are, how they relate to other symbols in the photograph, their context within the picture, and what actions or feelings they evoke.



Still Life – Light Awakening

Sometimes a “contrived photograph” develops over a period of time. But, at other times, it can be constructed quite rapidly. I felt an “inner excitement” when I observed the “light as a source” in the studio – and I could not work quickly enough to put the various objects together in order to make this still life.



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

“From the series ***The Peace Warriors of 2003***, produced as a reaction to the frustration I felt about the war in Iraq. The series began when I saw a figurative image evolve as I was working on an abstraction in my studio. It ‘spoke’ to me as a subconscious visual expression of my growing frustration with my attempts to reconcile my disturbancce over my country’s invasion of Iraq. This led to a several month exploration of my feelings through the making of the seriess which led to the book, ***The Peace Warriors of 2003***, published in 2004 by Nazraeli Press.”



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

Door and Stairs – Marblehead 1958

"Doors are closed, but the right moment opens them if you climb the stairs."

This photograph was made soon after the photographer's move to Boston –

"I climbed the unknown stairs and opened the doors – they were full of wonder and mystery."



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

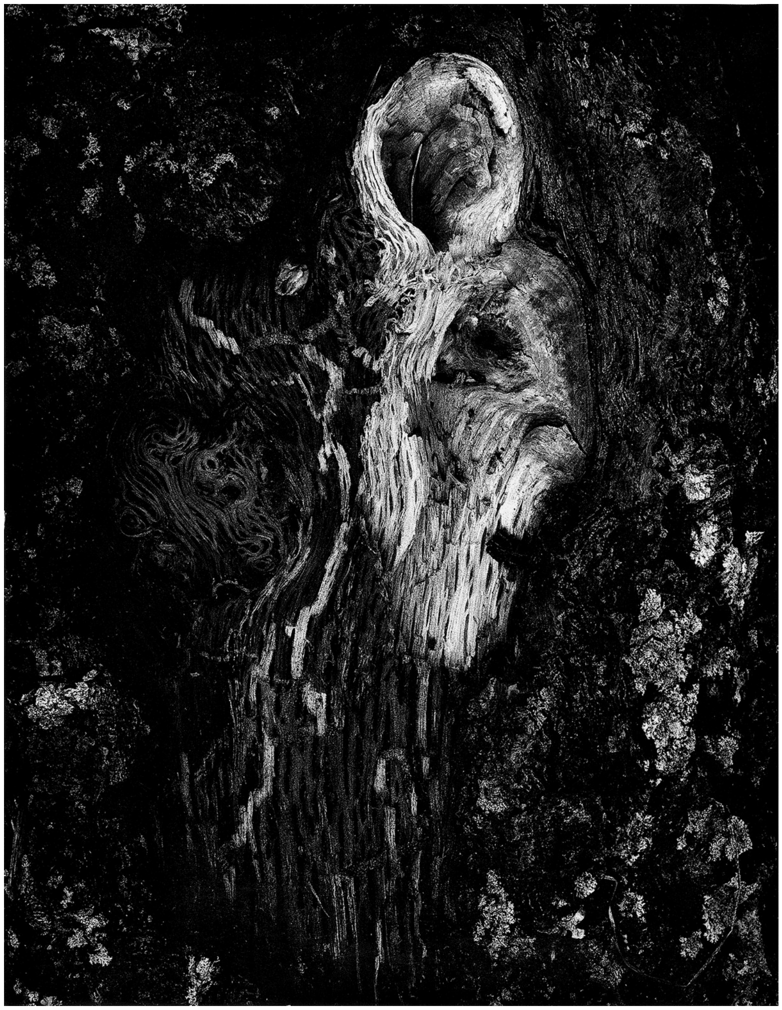
Peeling Paint - Interlochen 1958

"The mysterious contrasting of emotion (light and dark) of a swelling of sound (light and dark) from musicians - this was made while I was the photographer at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan."



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

"This is one of several prints in a sequence which with text carries my deep love of trains – being in them and around them send me into a meditative state of calm and openness. (The Locomotive Sequence is part of my artist book 'Interaction: Verbal/Visual' which was published in facsimile by Nazraeli Press a couple of years ago)." The photograph was made in Rochester, New York just before the photographer's move to Boston.



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

Hooded Tree Spirit - Ipswich 1960

"All the illusions and allusions of the spirits of the forest come to you when you open yourself to them. (Made soon after my move to Boston - making contact with the unknowns of New England)."

About The Author

Stuart Oring, the author, studied photography under Minor White, Charles Arnold and Ralph Hattersley at the Rochester Institute of Technology – where, in 1959, he earned a B.F.A. degree in Photography Illustration. In 1970, he received an M.A. degree in Communication from American University. His work at the University culminated in the thesis: A Comparative Investigation of Similarities and Differences in the Aesthetic Theories of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White. A Considerable amount of material from that research has been utilized in this publication.

Since 1969, the author has been studying how Synchronicity Systems, such as the Chinese I Ching, can be used as effective tools in the analysis of photographs. These methods can provide insights into the psychic state of the photographer at the time a photograph was made. Thus, traditional methods of looking at pictures can be expanded with creative new approaches in order to provide the viewer with a greater understanding as to what a picture might express.

Because of the significance of his work, in the field of visual communication, the author's biographical information has been included in such publications as:

- Who's Who in the World. 1995-
- Who's Who in America. 1996-
- Who's Who in the East. 1993-
- Men of Achievement. 1994-
- Cambridge Who's Who. 2008-
- The Dictionary of International Biography. 1994-

Artificial Intelligence & Photography Appendix

In the Appendix, I would like to illustrate how even photographs created by Artificial Intelligence can take a theme and illustrate it. The following photographs were created in order to show crows responding to music and the resulting photographs are how Artificial Intelligence interpreted the idea in various ways.

Finally, I would like to add a copy of my e-book: *A Beginner's Guide To Pictures* so that you may have a source book that will help you to better understand all of the photographs in this paper and photographs: *Artificial Intelligence & Photography.*



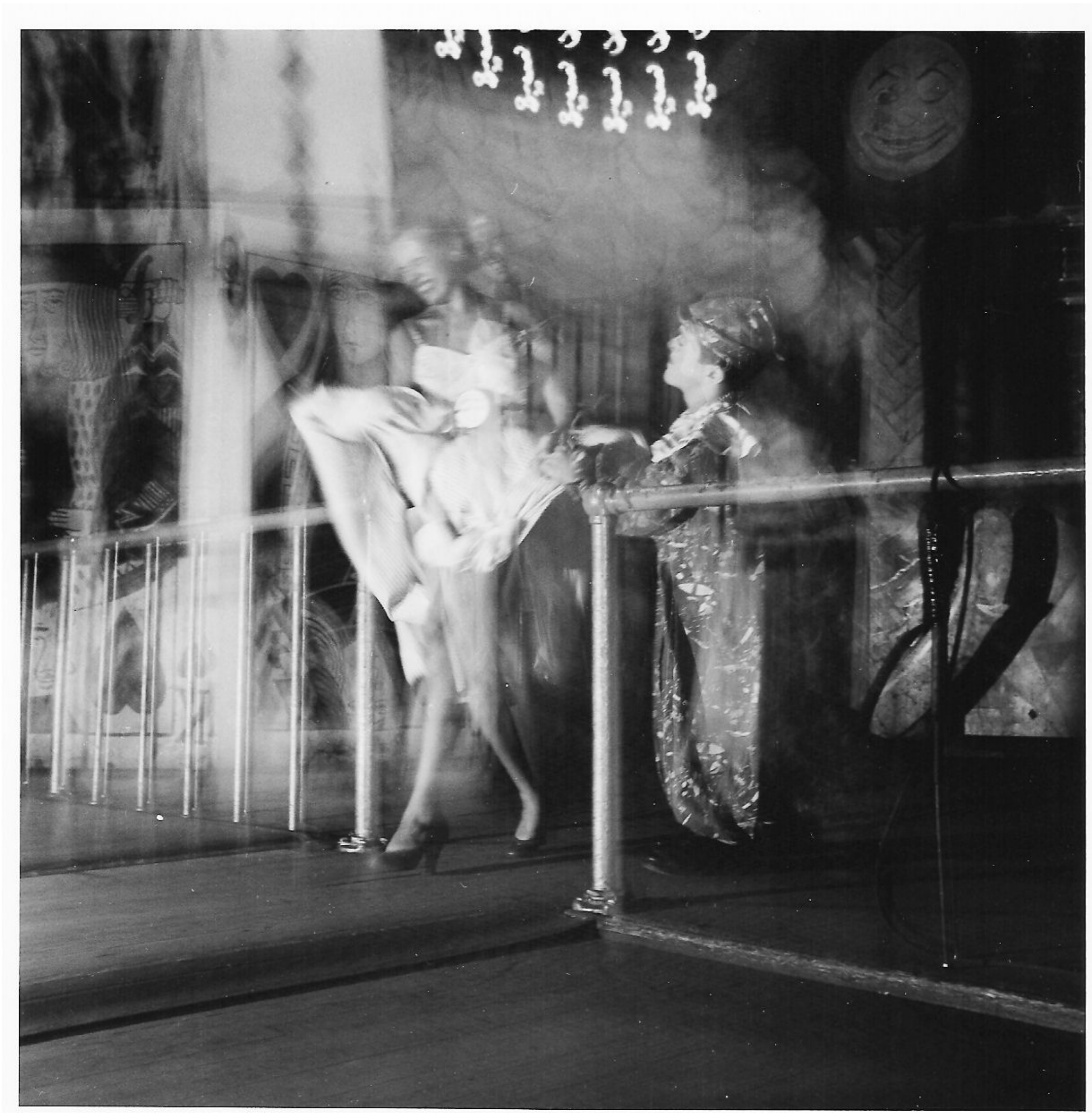



MOZART





A Beginner's Guide To Pictures



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PICTURES

BY

ISIS VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

COPYRIGHT © 1999 by Stuart A. Oring

Revised 2010

Stuart A. Oring
2570 Redbud Lane Owings, Maryland 20736

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

While this book has been written from the perspective of fine art photography, the theories, concepts, and procedures that it describes apply to other forms of visual art as well. If these methods are used correctly, they will enable you to look at pictures with a greater degree of insight and understanding than is otherwise possible.

At the present time, we find ourselves with a large body of knowledge related to the understanding of pictures. This information has come to us from a wide variety of disciplines. But, each approach to the understanding of pictures has certain strengths and weaknesses. And, each individual approach can only reveal a limited amount of the information that a picture might express. Furthermore, some of these procedures for analyzing and interpreting pictures are of little value because they serve only to bring forth memories and associations that are projected from our unconscious mind. Often, these memories or associations have little or nothing to do with what a picture may actually express visually.

Many people believe that a picture can cause a variety of responses and does not have a single predictable meaning. Perhaps this seems to be true because there are many different ways that a viewer can misinterpret what a picture might express due to intellectual and emotional factors, the ambiguity of some images, projection, the mind set of the viewer, differences in the life experiences of people, various blocks to understanding, or simply the inability of some people to understand how to read or interpret an image. Furthermore, we often overlook the fact that we pick up more from unconsciously scanning art than we are consciously aware of. Therefore, it is very important that we should tap into our unconscious mind for additional information and insights at some point during the process of trying to understand a picture.

It is my hope that this book will help to lead you in the direction of a comprehensive model for understanding pictures that will include:

- A logical and rational analysis of what you are consciously aware of in a picture

- A passive contemplative meditation of the picture in order to help you become aware of what your feelings about the picture might be

- A study of the picture’s design motifs and what they might suggest

- The use of biographical, historical, religious, philosophical, socio-logical, cultural, and psychological information whenever it seems to be appropriate to your understanding of a picture

- A study of the symbols in a picture – which includes the use of good symbol dictionaries as reference tools – in order to help you select the most appropriate meaning of symbols according to the context in which they have been used

- The use of methods that will help you to tap into your subconscious mind in order to reveal information and insights that you would have been unaware of otherwise

- A determination as to whether or not your feelings about what the picture expresses is supported by its form, content, and symbols

- A correlation of the data to help you to better understand a visual image and to reveal areas of conflict (and possible errors) in your analysis of a picture

It is possible to enjoy pictures without understanding them because we can allow art to cause enjoyable associations to arise within us – or we can use it to take us back to pleasant experiences in our past. But, if we fail to understand the feelings and ideas that are actually expressed in a work of art, we will never enjoy art to the fullest extent possible.

The comprehensive approach to art requires desire, time, and effort on the part of the viewer. So, it is natural to ask the question: Why should we spend this amount of time and effort in order to understand a picture? Perhaps the answer lies in the following analogy.

Interpreting a picture can be compared to solving a jigsaw puzzle. If the complete puzzle represents everything that a picture expresses, then each piece of the puzzle might stand for some part of the whole. For example, some pieces could represent segments of some intellectual idea – or some emotional or kinesthetic feeling. Other pieces of the puzzle could stand for the meaning of various design motifs – such as line, color, tonality, space, texture, shape, and balance. And, still other pieces could represent the various symbols in a picture and what they might signify – or important biographical, historical, sociological, or religious facts relevant to the life of the artist. Finally, we must remember that a work of art contains a great amount of visual information that we may not be aware of – but which may lie buried in our unconscious mind. If the puzzle is somehow to be solved, and if we are to understand a picture as well as can be expected, then it is necessary to put as many of the pieces together as possible. But, on the other hand, if our approach to reading pictures can only provide us with a limited amount of information about a picture, then our understanding of the picture will be limited as well.

We should look at images in multi-faceted ways. There are various levels of understanding images. At the First Level, things are recognized for what they are. At the Second Level, we try to realize the emotions felt. At the Third Level, we analyze the social, historical, and political arena. Where does the picture fit into the history of photography? Does it echo other photographers? At the Fourth Level, we undertake Freudian and Jungian exploration of psychological analysis. Here we see faces, symbols, and “play audience” until the act is over. At the Fifth Level, we discover what we can regarding the photographer. And, at the Sixth Level, we let the photograph speak to us while we are in passive concentration.

Associations

Although making and remembering our associations is a vital part of the process of understanding pictures, we mistakenly believe that our associations will lead us to a complete and accurate understanding of a picture. Some approaches to understanding pictures suggest that the viewer make note of any associations that might come to mind while engaging in methods that encourage free association to take place (such as meditation or “clustering”). But, it is not enough to create associations and to make note of them. Somehow, we must also tie-in these associations to the form, content, and symbols of a picture – or else we are in danger of misinterpreting pictures because our associations may be projections from our own unconscious. Associations can also be tied-in to memories from our past or they may be derived from various other causes that have more to do with ourselves than with the picture itself.

If free association allows us to uncover and explore areas that we might otherwise overlook when looking at pictures, then how can we let the free association process go free and what do we do with it afterwards? How do you decide? The answer may lie in looking at our associations as possibilities and not as absolute certainties.

There are a number of different ways that our associations may come into existence. They may come about naturally or we may create them. But, regardless of how they may come about, they are both helpful and necessary. If our associations are to possess validity, however, they must contain strong ties to the image itself. The question is: Which associations possess the strongest ties to the image – and why?

Associations play a significant part in picture analysis and interpretation. But, there are many other important aspects to reading a picture as well. In this book, we will investigate what the different components of reading a picture are, how they relate to one another, and how we can apply various procedures in order to look at pictures in a more insightful way

Memorable Quotations

"When An Urgency Is Present,
It seems To Find Many Mirrors Of Itself In The Visual World."

"Images Can Be A Record Of An Inner State
That The Photographer Neither Remembers Seeing Nor Experiencing
At The Moment Of Exposure."

The Image Can Be Seen To Mean Different Things To Us At Different Times –
And Since We Project Our Feelings
We Say That The Photograph Changes Its Meaning."

"The Photographer, Instead Of Photographing That Which Is,
Can Photograph That Which He Himself Is."

"Photographs Work As Equivalents With Certain People At Certain Times.
The Same Photograph Shown To Another Person
May Or May Not Function As An Equivalent."

"Dreams And Photographs Have Something In Common,
Those Photographs That Yield To Contemplation
At Least Have A Quality About Them That Tempt
One To Set Associations Going."

"What You Will Find Will Be Your Own.
The Experience Cannot Be Compared To Addition
Because That Implies One Right Answer And Many Wrong Ones.
Instead The Experience Should Be Compared To An Equation
One Factor Of Which Is The Viewer's State Of Mind.
When So Treated There Are As Many Right Answers
As Persons Who Contemplate The Picture;
And Only One Wrong Answer – No Experience."

"Let Associations Rise Like A Flock Of Birds From A Field.
What Do Various Parts Of The Photograph Remind You Of – Visually?
What Does The Picture As A Whole Suggest Again Visually?"

"If A Photograph Is Gazed At In Silence, Wordless Silence,
Until Intuitive Understanding Flashes –
An Inner State Of Awareness Is Reached.
In Zen It Is Called Koan. When The Koan Is Resolved,
It Is Realized To Be A Simple And Clear Statement
Made From The State Of Consciousness Which It Has Helped To Waken."

"Reading Photographs Is The Visual (Non-Verbal) Understanding
Of The Relationships Within A Photograph.
And, It Is The Understanding Of The Relations Between Two Or More Images.
Understanding On Any Level; Subject Matter, Design, Psychology, Technique –
May Lead To Vision.
Reading Photographs At A Verbal Level Becomes A Translation
From Visual To Verbal, With All The Problem That Translations
From One Language To Another Entail.
In This Case, The Translation Is From Photography To Literature."

"...All Photographs Are Self Portraits."

"Very Often I try To Find Something That Matches A Feeling I Have.
On The Other Hand, A Lot Of Times I Photograph With Nothing Specific In Mind.
I Just Play It As It Comes.
If It's Good, Fine.
I Find 'Letting It Happen' Relaxing, A Playful Vacation.
Stimulating Pictures Almost Always Result."

"The Unexpected Image Was The Record Of An Inner State
That I Did Not Remember Seeing And Did Not Remember Experiencing
At The Moment Of Exposure."

"When I Looked At Things For What They Are I Was Fool Enough To Persist
In My Folly And Found That Each Photograph Was A Mirror Of My Self."

"A Sequence Of Photographs Is Like A Cinema Of Stills.
The Time And Space Between Photographs Is Filled By The Beholder,
First Of All From Himself, Then From What He Can Read
In The Implications Of Design, The Suggestions Springing From Treatment,
And Any Symbolism That Might Grow From Within The Subject Itself."

"At First Glance A Photograph Can Inform Us.
At Second Glance It Can Reach Us."

"Photography Is A Language More Universal Than Words."

Minor White

"Photography, used as a fine art, is what any artist makes of it. For the analytical artist, photography is a tool to record his visual curiosity, his visual understanding, and his visual contemplation of the world. For the objective artist, photography can reveal the meanings of things and render surfaces with love and beauty. The subjective artist can use photography as a means of self-expression – simply by dissociating the subject from its connotations. When photography is used in this manner, the unconscious mind can be reached through the reading of the photograph's design. Discarding the connotations of subjects leaves them symbols that can be read like dreams. The world of the unconscious mind is turned into the raw material of art."

Minor White. "What is Photography?," Photo Notes, (Spring, 1950).

"The photographic image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. The photographer can put things into the subconscious and get a visual answer in time – if he works in a seeing state with a blank and responsive mind, and if something is fed into the subconscious mind through meditation. Sometimes the relationship between what has been fed into the subconscious can be seen instantly, sometimes only after the print is seen in meditation.

The photographer's task is to make emotional feelings come out visually. The process by which this occurs can be called: The Unconscious Creative Cycle. First, an idea feeling becomes isolated and drops into the subconscious from the surface mind. The photographer's mind is thus sensitized, and found objects or objects in the studio develop into an idea when put together. Next, there is a visual echo of the idea feeling. The photographer recognizes that something exciting has happened, but he may or may not know the cause. The photograph may be the result of contemplation and pre-visualization; or it can be created very quickly, as a result of the photographer's recognition that something of importance has taken place. Finally, the new photograph is contemplated and the idea feeling is identified. The conscious and unconscious are united by feeling, which leads to their fusion in a spontaneous public image or photograph."

Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communication, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958; and Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960).

"…It is only after I have put down an equivalent of what has moved me that I can even begin to think about its meaning. I have to have experienced something that moves me and is beginning to take form within me, before I can see what are called 'shapes.' Shapes, as such, mean nothing to me unless I happen to be feeling something within, of which an equivalent appears in outer form."

Quotation from Alfred Stieglitz appearing in Dorothy Norman's book Introduction to an American Seer, New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1960.

“With the **Essence Image**, the photographer tries to work from the intuitive or sensed reality of the subject. The attitude of the photographer is to find the wonder and revelation of a subject through the direct experience of the thing for what it is.”

Minor White. “Conscious Photography” (Unpublished Treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968).

“To reach essence, the photographer cannot work as the painter does. The photographer cannot pile up characteristics until an essence is synthesized. He must wait until a face, gesture, or place goes ‘transparent’ and thereby reveals the essence underneath. This exact instant, when the subject bares its inner core is a transitory and fleeting moment. It is never repeated exactly. The expressive function of the camera is to make photographs that reveal the essence of the subject along with the facts.”

Minor White. “Photography is an Art,” Design XLIX, 4 (December, 1947).

“…The photographer’s power lies in his ability to recreate his subject in terms of its basic reality and to present this re-creation in such a form that the spectator feels that he is seeing not just a symbol for the object but the thing itself revealed for the first time.”

Edward Weston. “What is Photographic Beauty?” American Photography, XLV, 12 (December1951).

“In Weston’s photographs, the texture, the physical quality of things is rendered with the utmost exactness: the rough is rough, the smooth is smooth, flesh is alive, stone is hard. The things have a definite proportion and weight, and are placed at a clearly defined distance one from another. In one word, the beauty which these photographs of Weston’s possess is photographic beauty!”

Nancy Newhall. The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, Vol. I, The Daybooks of Edward Weston. (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1961).

“The aim is to capture the beauty not merely of appearance but of the spirit; it is inner beauty manifesting itself outwards. It is the beauty of the innermost nature of things, the beauty of hidden truth….The foremost principle in art lies in a successful rendering of the spirit each object has. There would be no need for talking about principles of painting, if painting were no more than an art of copying the shape. The ultimate aim of painting is to represent the spirit of the object.

Makoto Ueda. Literary and Art Theories in Japan. Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1967.

Some Things That Pictures Can Do

- A picture may stir up an audience.

- A picture may symbolize a state of mind.

- A picture may relate to surrealism.

- A picture may not be realistic. It may be abstract and emphasize the typical qualities of the subject.

- A picture may reveal things in a new and different way. New ways of seeing things are some of the biggest uses of the camera.

And, do not overlook the "mental fiendishness" of the photographer. The photographer may be trying to surprise or shock you. If you "draw a blank," it is sometimes helpful to relate pictures to other experiences. Remember, however, that you may not be the audience for a particular picture.

When you look at a picture, it may be helpful to assume that it is a studio set-up and that everything in it, inch by inch, tone-by-tone was planned. Or, if it is candid, that when the photographer saw it – he recognized it. Study everything that the photographer did and then ask yourself why the photographer did it.

It also helps to classify a picture into one of several categories. A picture may show "reality," in which case it may be "documentary" or "photo-journalistic." Or, a picture may be a record of the photographer's "inner state" experienced at the time of exposure. So, the photographer instead of photographing "that which is," can instead photograph "that which he himself is." On the other hand, the photographer is able to show how he feels about the subject or he can show the essence of the subject and its "inner qualities." Things are shown for what they are. As the audience, we have to go out of ourselves and out of our way to understand the object, its fact and essence.

It is necessary to understand that an object can have more than one essential quality or essence. A rock can be both hard and mysterious. One cloud can be soft and lyrical – another, dynamic and threatening.

Everyone perceives differently. What the photographer feels to be the essential qualities of the subject, may or may not be the same as what others perceive to be its essence. A photograph may be an answer to either a visual or psychological problem that the photographer has been working on for a long time. Or, it may be a sketch for future understanding and study.

Introduction

We live in a world surrounded by pictures – and yet most people know very little about pictures or how to understand them. If you feel frustrated or discouraged when you look at pictures because you cannot understand them, then this is written especially for you.

A good deal of information has been written on the subject of "how to look at pictures" – but some of it is worthless and much of it is far too complicated for most people to understand. Even information that may be helpful lies scattered about in many different subject areas – such as art, photography, psychology, and theories about perception. To make matters worse, very few magazines or books that are published about art or photography tell us what it is that pictures might express – or what the artist or photographer may have had in mind. Instead, we are usually given lengthy descriptions about art history, art theory, and the artist's life and style. However, it is equally important for us to have an awareness of the ideas or feelings that are expressed in a picture – and how this has been accomplished.

Understanding pictures will never be simple. But, "the visual language" can be learned – just as any other language can be learned. Although you will be able to get some enjoyment from pictures without knowing very much about them, you will enjoy them a great deal more if you are willing to put in a little time and effort – in order to explore some very important things about them, such as:

- Design Motifs In Art And What They Mean
- The Role Of Symbols And How To Understand Them
- The Psychology Of Perception
- The Psychology Of Creating And Viewing Art
- The Function Of The Unconscious In Art

But, before you go ahead and take the first step of your journey, there is something else that you should know. Some pictures are more difficult to understand than others. If you should find that you cannot understand a particular picture, then perhaps you are trying to understand a picture that is simply too difficult for you at this particular time. If that is the case, then you should put the picture aside for now and return to it later when you understand pictures a little bit better.

To make "looking at pictures" fun, always select pictures to look at that are interesting to you. And, try "reading" pictures with friends who also enjoy pictures and what they might mean.

After you are able to put these principles into practice, and find that you are able to look at pictures with some degree of understanding, try exploring the books and articles on “the recommended reading list.” While some of these publications are currently out of print, most of them should still be available through inter-library loan.

The Different Kinds Of Pictures

There are several different kinds of pictures. In order to understand a picture, you will need to know what kind of a picture you are looking at and what its purpose may be.

- Informational Pictures inform the mind. Pictures, which explain, instruct, or report belong to this classification. Reading such a picture depends a great deal on having a specialized knowledge of the subject.

- Documentary Pictures act as a bridge to experience, taking the viewer to the original event, place, or time. The photographer or artist attempts to report – yet leave himself or herself out.

- Pictorial Pictures can show us some essential quality of the subject or how the artist or photographer saw the subject and felt about it. Generally, the pictorialist is less concerned with recording the subject than the picture it will yield. These pictures reveal how the artist or photographer sees and everything in the picture contributes something to the total meaning of the picture.

- The Equivalent is a picture that stands for a feeling that the creative artist has had about something. The subject of the picture acts as a metaphor of that feeling. “Feeling” refers here to the creative artist’s notion of the inner nature of the subject. In the Equivalent, no attempt is made to imitate the outer features of the original subject.

Occasionally, pictures can transcend categories. Informational and Documentary pictures can be aesthetic.

A picture can portray subject matter literally as we would normally expect to see it – or non-literally where the subject matter (or reality) is changed in some way. Literal pictures can show us people, objects, and their relationships, as we would normally expect to see them. Non-literal pictures make changes in the subject matter to show us “Things For What Else They Are.” These pictures involve changes in lighting, texture, tonality, and space. The actual subject matter serves as a symbol for some idea or feeling of the artist. Ice, for example, may not represent frozen water – but it might symbolize a state of immobility instead.

If the image is realistic or documentary, ask yourself: What reality about the subject does it show? What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

A picture can reveal the essence of the subject, how the artist feels about the subject, an idea or feeling that the creative artist has – or some inner state of mind. In order to understand pictures, we should try to understand why the artist created the picture in the first place. Ask yourself: Does the picture reveal some essential quality of the subject? If so, what is the essential quality that you feel? Or, do you feel as though the artist has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject? If so, why? If the picture works as an Equivalent, try to understand what feeling or idea it might express. If the picture portrays an inner state of mind, try to understand what state of mind it portrays.

A Passive Approach

In order to begin, it is helpful to try to understand what your overall response to the picture might be. And, remember, your response to the picture may or may not be what the artist intended to express – or what the picture might actually express. Begin by asking yourself:

1. What does the image suggest to me?
2. Does it have human or animal-like qualities?
3. What feelings do I get from the image?

In order to get in touch with your feelings about a picture, it will be necessary to be still with yourself and to contemplate the picture for a period of time. Passive and silent contact with an image is at least as valuable as active contact, perhaps more so. It is only by being still with ourselves, that we can make ourselves receptive to the suggestions coming from the images that well up into the conscious mind from the subconscious.

Work “in contact” with the image and sustain the awareness simply by listening in utter silence and stillness for the image to speak. This is a special form of “listening” that is directly connected with seeing. It is felt by some to be a “listening with the eyes.” So, keep out the usual sounds and maintain a space of silence. Be patient and relax. When the image speaks, it will do so in your own language. Passivity – letting it happen – is different than actively forcing contact. At times, the passive approach will be the only way to reach the meaning of an image. By being still you can make yourself voluntarily receptive to the suggestions coming from the image.

One of the first signs that contact with the image is about to take place is that the perception of space within the image will suddenly increase. Other changes that may be experienced in the image include an increase of overall brightness or a change in size.

The image should be scanned until everything in the picture has been seen and noted – including all of the relationships in the picture. When everything has been observed, let whatever associations flow that the image may cause to arise within you. The associations that flow up in you while looking at the image seem to originate in the image itself, but actually the associations originate in yourself. Ambivalent images and the associations that flow while looking at such images transform pictures into a self-mirror. In order to discern whether our impressions and associations are expressed by the image – or whether they originate within ourselves – it is necessary to decide whether or not they are supported by the form, content, and symbols of the picture.

Activity is not the only way to work in a state of stillness with an image or to remain sensitive to the suggestions that the image may provide. You will derive similar rewards if you remain passive. Sit in stillness, waiting, waiting patiently, without anxiety, waiting in readiness to receive suggestions and impressions. Sooner or later the image will “speak” to you if you “listen” with the eyes in wordless silence.

The Orientals have a simple approach to understanding pictures. Oriental Literature says to sit with a picture, as one would before a sage, patiently waiting for a few “words of wisdom.” Some westerners know this too. Some have put images they are trying to understand in out of the way corners of the house. In such locations, the eye will catch them unawares – and see the images in a different light. In other words, the more habitual ways of seeing images are tricked away and one sees briefly without the usual associations. In this way, one sees the image in all of its unfamiliar beauty – and without our personal projections.

Working in this state of passive recall, one can see without trying to see, the strange beauty of a photograph or the wonder of the commonplace. Later, the image can be recalled and the experience continued – or one can interact awarefully with the image in an entirely new way. The recall period, like the original contact period, is subject to all kinds of influences – including our associations.

Take a final impression and then write down your observation about the experience. What did you become aware of concerning the image that you were not aware of before? Did the image change in some way?

An Active Approach

Basically, in The Active Approach," we explain what the artist or photographer was trying to say – and how he or she used each visible component toward that end. The active work of experiencing a photograph consists in "scanning" the image until everything in the photograph has been seen and noted. The spectator should become acquainted with each object and with every detail within the photograph as well as with the relationships between objects and the space they inhabit. When all of the relationships in the photograph have been observed, the viewer should bring his technical knowledge and philosophies about the medium to bear on the image. The viewer analyzes composition with the surface mind; with intuition he feels the relation of composition to the picture content. The spectator can establish empathy with the image by using his imagination to mentally "project" himself into the various objects within the photograph.

At the end of the work period, the state of stillness is turned off in brief steps. A final impression of the image should be taken before looking elsewhere. Then, the experience should be held on to in silence. The various things, which have been seen and noted, should be reviewed as related visuals.

The more questions you can find to ask of a picture and the more detailed answers you work out for the questions, the better you will read the picture. But, don't accept just any answer to your questions. Examine them very carefully. Reading a picture becomes a process of discovering its purpose and discovering the various means the artist used to achieve that purpose. In order to do this, you will need to ask such questions as:

- Why are there three people in the picture and not two?
- Why was the picture cropped in this particular way?
- Why does the picture show the subject from a low angle?
- Why is the picture dark and gloomy?
- Why does the lighting seem right for the picture?
- Why are the shadows disturbing?
- Why has a rather confusing setting been used?

In order to understand pictures, it is very important to be extremely aware of what you see in the picture. It is helpful if you describe and write down everything that you are aware of. No detail should be overlooked because it may be important to your understanding of a picture.

Next, ask yourself questions about the picture such as:

- What is the subject of the picture?
- What action takes place in the picture?
- What person or object receives the action in the picture?
- What is the setting where the action takes place?
- What do the various tonal areas suggest to you?
- What do the light areas suggest?
- What do the dark areas suggest?
- What do the middle tone areas suggest?
- What do the tonal areas suggest when viewed together?
- What does the use of space in the picture suggest?
- What does the lighting suggest?

In writing and speaking, words serve as verbal symbols for what we may wish to express or communicate. In visual communication, such as painting or photography, visual symbols express feelings and ideas according to their relationship with the various parts of a picture. Symbols play a very important role in either form of communication and there are some things that you will need to know about them.

The various elements of design in a picture function as symbols. And, every design motif can have a variety of “symbolic meanings” according to the subject matter of the picture. These design motifs include: tonality, space, line, color, texture, shape, and form etc. For example, horizontal lines may suggest rest, diagonal lines may suggest motion, dark tones appear gloomy, light tones might suggest joy and so on. If you do not understand the elements of design, you will be greatly handicapped when you try to understand pictures, because you will have to rely on your emotional reaction to these design elements alone.

Another kind of symbol that we need to be concerned about is “The Object Symbol.” Objects often have symbolic meanings in pictures – and there can be psychological meanings, mythological meanings, cultural meanings, or archetypal meanings. (Basically, archetypal symbols are symbols that are shared by various cultures from the present time to the very distant past.)

One should look at a picture for what is actually there – and for what it says – not for the effects that were used and how they were achieved. When and how a photograph was created has nothing to do with the essential life of the picture. People, who speculate too much about the technical aspects of a photograph, never see the picture itself. It is best to respond to photographs for the feelings that are expressed within them – or the spirit that they possess.

In order to understand pictures, it is necessary to decide what symbols may be present in a picture, what the symbols might mean, and how they relate to the rest of the picture. If a picture portrays subject matter objectively, there may not be any “object symbols” in the picture that we will need to try to understand – although even in this kind of a picture – design motifs, space, lighting, and tonality etc. have symbolic meanings that serve to influence how we feel about the image. However, if a picture is subjective and portrays the ideas or feelings of the artist, we will need to try to understand what the various “object symbols” in the picture might signify as well.

We use a dictionary to look up “the best meaning” of a word – according to how that word has been used in a sentence. Likewise, it may be necessary to look up the meaning of a visual symbol in a good symbol dictionary to help us decide what the best meaning of a symbol may be in a picture – according to the context in which that symbol has been used. Symbols can have many different meanings and it is not possible to rely only upon your personal feelings and associations as to what a symbol might signify. The actual meaning of a symbol will depend upon the subject content of the picture and the symbol’s relationship to the various parts of the picture. If a symbol’s meaning does not make sense according to the context in which it is used in the picture, then it will be necessary to select another meaning for that symbol.

Having decided what emotional feelings and associations the picture causes within you, ask yourself: Do these feelings or associations match the symbolic meaning of the picture? And, Do my feelings about the picture agree with those I get from the design motifs (including the feelings of space, lighting, and tonality)? If the answers to both of these questions are “yes,” then you are probably on the right track. If not, then your feelings about the picture are probably wrong and you have probably misconstrued what the picture may mean.

Your feelings about a picture should be derived from the form, content, and symbols of the image. They should never be tied-in to associations that are projected from your subconscious – if these associations are a self-mirror of yourself.

Allow some time to pass by and then look at the picture again. After some time has passed you will see the picture differently than you did before and you can expect that you will discover many things in it that you did not notice previously.

Try not to become discouraged if you cannot understand a picture at first. Some pictures are more difficult to understand than others. And, understanding pictures requires some effort, patience, and time. If the parts of a picture are pushed around often enough and long enough our subconscious mind will help us work out the solution.

Procedure For The Analysis Of Photographs

At first, one should feel the emotional significance of a photograph and then use intellectual analysis to bear out or disprove those feelings. To look at a photograph with a predisposed mind, may blind us to what the photograph says. This method of print analysis is based on the contemplation of visible relationships, as well as intellectual and emotional meanings. All of the visible occurrences in a photograph (or painting) can be analyzed for what they are.

The various concepts, such as light quality and space, have a bearing on the mood of a picture as well as a profound effect on the meaning of the picture. Although many concepts and elements overlap and combine to establish the mood of a picture, they can be isolated in order to describe their functional effect on the picture. For example, if we can disassociate in our minds the light that occurs in a print from the subject of the print, the light itself can be felt to have an effect on the total mood.

Concepts are useful only if they help us get at the significance of a photograph or painting. The important thing is to identify the “idea-feeling” of the photographer (or artist) and to understand what it is that the artist is saying. If the picture is emotionally a blank, deliberate analysis of the various concepts may help us to understand the picture’s significance.

Any picture that communicates does so because a person is reading it. The process of reading a picture can be an intellectual effort, an intuitive one, or a combination of both. To make "a reading," verbalization is necessary. One has to speak or write about one's experience of a photograph or painting. In the process of translating a visual experience into verbal expression, slips are bound to occur and so verbalizing should be done only after the picture is experienced – and it should be done only if there is sufficient reason.

Reading a photograph or painting may be based on what it reminds you of. It is a "verbalization" of your experience of a picture. The process of "reading a photograph" converts a non-verbal experience into a verbal one. Non-verbal communication does not involve the spoken word. It may be conscious or unconscious. It may be made by gestures or through the meaning of objects themselves. It may use signs and symbolism.

A picture must be read without criticism. When we dislike a picture, we immediately "shut off" any further communication. When we like a picture, we are pleased to carry on a relationship with it through an interchange of visual and verbal symbols. Once evaluation is suspended, we can concentrate on the significance of the picture.

The critic must withhold judgment long enough to find what is going on in the picture. Analysis may be used in order to keep the conscious mind busy so that the intuitive side of the man can go to work. Often, the critic will bring an entire system of analysis to bear in order to free the intuitive forces within himself. He keeps his attention fixed on the visuals of a picture without losing sight of the significance.

It is important to decide whether the photograph is "documentary," "pictorial," "informational," or some other kind of photograph. There are appropriate methods for experiencing each type of photograph. The "Informational Photograph" can be read for the information it contains in a special field, and it can be read pictorially if we bypass information and observe its aesthetic qualities. In the case of the "Pictorial Photograph," we isolate those associations, which seem to pertain to the photograph. The graphics, the design, and all the other visual concepts, are the means to tell another person about the photograph's pertinent associations.

Readings of photo-journalistic work should usually be done in the light of the subject, and how the photographer has used the subject matter. The reason for reading a photograph is that it enables us to understand "what is going on in the photograph" technique-wise and communication-wise.

It is generally believed that a picture can cause a great many different associations to rise up within us and that they are all equally valid. But, we should only look upon these associations as possibilities – which may or may not be meaningful. Associations that cannot be tied-in to the form, content, and symbols of the picture may not be pertinent. They may only be projections from our own subconscious.

We pick up more from the unconscious scanning of a picture than we may be consciously aware of – and we do so more efficiently. While pictures contain a great deal of information that we are consciously aware of, they also contain a considerable amount of information that lies below our conscious level in the subconscious. Therefore, when studying pictures, it is important to study not only what we are consciously aware of – but to tap our subconscious for information as well. No detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant, should be overlooked because it may be important to the meaning of a picture.

A thorough analysis should include: a logical-rational analysis of what we are consciously aware of in the picture; a determination as to whether or not our feelings about the picture are actually supported by the form, content, and symbols; a study of the picture's design elements; the use of methods that will enable us to tap into our unconscious; and a correlation of the data.

Characteristics Of The Experience

What you "find" in a photograph will be your own. There is not only one right answer and many wrong ones. There are as many right answers as there are persons who contemplate a photograph. And, the only wrong answer is no experience at all. Whether the more active or more passive method is used, the result of the contemplation is to be experience. This may happen through "a flame burst of understanding," or it may occur after a picture has been lived with for some period of time.

A picture may be "engaged" casually by the subconscious mind for weeks or months before it is set up as a target for intense concentration. During this time, the unconscious mind engages the picture in its own way and all of the various things that are present in the picture provide a rich feast for the subconscious mind. (We may project human qualities into the picture, parts of the subject may suggest faces or other parts of the human anatomy, or other associations may be set into motion within us.)

No one can predict what a person will experience when reading a photograph. The experience must be accepted for what it is. Moreover, once the surface meaning of a photograph is identified, it takes concentration and discipline to carry out a reading.

Many people see themselves in photographs, and most of us see what we wish to see, or anything else except what is actually present. Projection and empathy lead us to see something of ourselves almost automatically in anything that we look at long enough to be aware of. The photograph, therefore, invariably functions as a mirror of at least some part of the spectator. Many persons, looking at a photograph, see something of themselves before they see anything else. Some degree of mirroring happens with any photograph, but it is especially strong with the "non-literal" or stylized photograph. Mirroring is also strong in photographs where the presence of design is equal to or stronger than the sense of the presence of the subject in front of the camera. When subject matter is rendered in an obscure or ambiguous fashion, we invent a subject for it. What we invent is derived from ourselves, and the photograph then becomes a mirror of some part of ourselves.

Recommended Reading

Barrett, Terry. Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images. Mountainview, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1996.

_______. Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary. Mountainview, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994.

Brooke, James T. A Viewer's Guide to Looking At Photographs. Wilmette, Illinois: The Aurelian Press, 1977.

Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. A Dictionary of Symbols. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basic Blackwell, Inc., 1944.

Chiarenza, Carl. Interaction: Verbal/Visual. Portland, Oregon: Nazraeli press, 2006.

Cirlot, J.E. A Dictionary of Symbols. New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1971.

Cooper, J.C. An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1993.

Feldman, Edmund B. Varieties of Visual Experience. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Gassan, Arnold. "A Notebook Resume of the Workshop in Photography (Summer, 1962), Conducted by Minor White in Denver, Colorado." Unpublished MS in the archive of the Center For Creative Photography, University of Arizona, (Typescript.)

Hall, James. Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974.

______, Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1994.

Hattersley, Ralph. "How to Read a Photograph," Popular Photography, XLII, 3 (March, 1958), 54-104.

______. "Photo-Symbolism" Popular Photography, LXIV, 3 (March, 1969), 69-72.

Oring, Stuart A. Understanding Pictures – theories, exercises, and procedures. Owings, Maryland: Isis Visual Communications, 1992.

______. "Stieglitz, Weston, Adams, White – Experiencing the Photograph," Photographic Business And Product News, (May, 1974), 46-47, 58, 60, 64-66.

Roberts, Helene F., ed. (1998). Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography. (1st ed., Vols. 1-2). Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

Watkins, C. Law. The Language of Design. Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1946.

White, Minor. "What Is Meant By Reading Photographs," Aperture, V, 2 (1957), 48-50.

_______. "A Psychological Explanation of Contemplation," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 58-61.

_______. "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," Aperture, X, 3 (1962), 116-28.

_______. "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," Ways of Growth, eds. Herbert A. Otto and John Mann. New York: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1968.

_______. "Analysis of Five Prints," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels. New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951.

_______. and Walter Chappell. "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," Aperture, V, 4 (1957), 156-71.

Let us now take a photograph and analyze it as comprehensively as possible. To do this, we must try to understand our emotional feelings about the photograph – and we will need to determine if our feelings about the image are justified by carrying out a logical-rational analysis of the picture.

Preliminary Statement About The Photograph

Some inner urgency caused the photographer to create the forms that brought this photograph into existence. He felt some kind of an inner excitement and then made the photograph. If you push the parts of the photograph around long enough, and follow the suggestions that have been given to you in this "guide," something should take place and the image will suggest possible meanings to you. Write down what your experiences with the image are, and then compare your write-up with the example analysis that follows.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Appendix A

(Example Of An Analysis Of A Photograph)

What is the overall feeling that you get from the picture?

Passing through a gateway back to reality from an emotionally unpleasant and absurd situation

Does it have human or animal-like shapes or qualities?

Yes, it has human-like shapes and qualities – but it has other shapes and qualities as well (i.e. ghost-like figures, a clown's head, a heart shape).

What are the implied relationships in the picture?

What do they suggest?

The girl's expression shows a difficult situation that caused anguish.

The man watching the girl and standing nearby suggests a guide.

The opening in the barrier or fence suggests a gateway from one area to another.

The blurred light areas suggest unreality.

The ghost-like heads suggest ghosts from the past.

The heart shape, near the girl, suggest human emotions.

What are the various feelings that you get from the picture?

The Lighting makes you feel:

Theatre-like make believe

The Tonality makes you feel:

Mystery

The Space in the picture makes you feel:

Contrast between reality and unreality

Touch/Tactile Sensations make you feel:

The suggestion of objects but not the essence of skin, cloth, or metal etc.

Motion/Kinesthetic Sensations make you feel:

Motion or exiting someplace

Design/Composition Sensations make you feel:

The movement of people and life-like fantasy shapes

What do the light, middle tone, and dark areas each suggest?

The light tones suggest unreality – the dark tones suggest a feeling of mystery. The middle tones in front of the girl suggest reality.

What do they suggest when viewed together?

A feeling of movement from a mysterious and unreal situation back to reality.

Now relax, be still with yourself. Contemplate and meditate on the picture for at least 10 minutes.

What impressions about the picture do you get from meditation?

Unreality, fantasy, ghost-like images, anguish, and guidance

List what you see in the picture.

The blurred image of a tall young lady

The lady is exiting an area that suggests a “fun house.”

A short, guide-like man is watching and assisting her.

A dark curtain is in the background.

There are hidden ghost-like shapes, the cutout shape of a clown’s head, and a heart-like shape.

What is the subject of the picture?

The young lady

What action takes place?

The lady is walking away from a fantasy-like area.

What person or object receives the action?

A fantasy-like area with a guide-like person

Describe the setting where the action takes place.

- Large blurred cards
- Several face-like shapes
- Repetitive abstract shapes
- A dark and fantasy-like area with a guide
- A railing that separates the fantasy-like area from reality

If the picture is realistic or documentary, what reality about the subject does it show?

What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

The picture is not documentary. Instead, it seems to express the photographer’s idea or feeling about the subject’s relationship to her environment. There are many symbols in the picture that need to be interpreted before the image can be understood.

If the subject material is not easily identifiable, the subject seems to suggest:

An “Alice in Wonderland” fantasy-like quality

The action seems to suggest:

Leaving an area where fantasy is experienced

The object or person acted upon seems to suggest:

The subject has felt anguish or pain because of the experience.

The setting seems to suggest:

Unreality

Write one or more paragraphs that describe in detail what happens in the picture.

A tall, young lady is exiting a fenced area that seems unreal and appears to have caused her anguish and pain. A guide is assisting her through the fantasy area and she is now passing through a gateway back to reality. There are repetitive light shapes, blurred face-like forms that suggest ghosts, and a dark mysterious curtain in the background.

List the symbols and possible metaphors that you see in the picture – and then write down the associations or meanings that these symbols and possible metaphors have for you according to how they are used in the picture.

The winking, round, clown-like face and greater than life sized cards suggest absurdity and unreality.

The blurred light areas and the blurred face of the girl suggest movement towards reality.

The girl’s expression suggests an emotional situation that has caused pain or anguish.

Leaving a fenced area suggests leaving an area of demarcation.

The closed curtain suggests separation.

A guide-like man suggests a need for guidance.

Ghost-like faces suggest ghosts from the past.

A heart-shape form suggests that human emotions are involved.

Take the paragraph(s) that you wrote, describing the picture, and re-write the paragraph(s) using the symbolic meanings of the various symbols and metaphors that are in the picture wherever it is appropriate to do so.

A tall, young lady has been in a fantasy-like situation (the environment) that has caused her anguish or pain (her expression and the heart-like shape). The situation was absurd (the clown-like face) and ghosts of that situation still haunt her (ghost-like figures). Some separation was involved (the mysterious curtain). But, with guidance, she was able to leave or exit the situation.

How do these symbols and/or metaphors influence one another to affect the meaning of the picture?

The setting of a fantasy-like place suggests unreality.

An emotional situation is suggested by the lady's expression.

The fence suggests a demarcation of two distinct areas.

The background curtain symbolizes separation.

There is a guide or custodian present to provide assistance.

A clown-like face on the curtain could symbolize absurdity.

The heart shape suggests that human emotions are involved.

What do you think the artist or photographer was trying to say?

When we are in a situation that causes emotional anguish we may need guidance.

How did he or she use each visible part of the picture to help say it?

Blurred Images

Over-sized Cards

A paper cutout face with a face-like form to the left

The blurred face of a young lady expressing emotion

A guide-like figure located next to the lady

A metal fence, which seems to separate the areas of fantasy and reality

What is the mood of the picture?

Anguish caused by an “unreal” situation

How did the artist or photographer establish this mood?

The symbolic meaning of the various objects in the picture

The relationship of the people and objects in the picture to one another

The emotional feelings that the tonalities suggest

The spatial relationships in the photograph

What are the artist’s or photographer’s ideas and attitudes towards the subject?

Fantasy and reality need to be clearly separated.

Guidance can be helpful in an emotional situation.

What tricks were used to get the artist’s or photographer’s ideas across?

What alternatives could the artist or photographer have used to express the same idea or feeling?

This photograph is realistic but a surrealistic style could have been used to express the same idea. By doing so, however, the situation portrayed in the picture would appear to be less real and true to life than it seems to be here. And, it would seem to be more of a fantasy than actual reality.

Does the picture reveal the essence of the subject? If so, what essential qualities does it show?

There is a state of mind expressed rather than the essence of the subject.

Do you feel as though the artist or photographer has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject?

Yes

If so, why?

An "idea-feeling" of the photographer has been expressed visually by means of symbols.

What kind of influence did the artist or photographer have on the subject?

It appears as though the photographer did not direct the subjects in the photograph – but rather waited and made the picture at "the decisive moment."

Do you think the picture was candid or posed? Why?

The picture appears to be candid because of the following:

Existing Light

Blurred Imagery

The photographer's use of a miniature camera

The people appear to be natural and "true-to-life

Does the picture work as an "Equivalent" or "Metaphor"?

Yes

If so, what is the idea or feeling that is expressed?

A painful and absurd separation from reality requires a guide to help you leave the fantasy situation and return to reality.

If the picture portrays an inner state of mind, then what state of mind does it portray?

A painful and absurd separation from reality requires a guide to help you leave the fantasy situation and return to reality.

Guidance may be required to help us get through these experiences.

Are your feelings about the picture supported by the form (or design-motifs) and the meaning of the various symbols?

Yes

If not, then re-check your interpretation of the picture.
If they are, then you are probably on the right track!

Now, put aside the picture for a reasonable period of time, and then look at the picture again.

Are your feelings about the picture the same as before or are they different?

My feelings about the picture are essentially the same – but over a period of time I have gotten new insights about the picture.

In what ways have they changed?

Not applicable

What new insights do you have about the picture now that you did not have before?

The clown-like face seems to suggest absurdity.
The ghost-like forms suggest ghosts from the past.
The heart-like shape seems to symbolize human emotions.
The curtain in the background symbolizes separation.

You may be able to obtain insights from sources outside of yourself that can help to shape your understanding of a picture. Sometime during the analysis of a picture you should answer the following questions:

If the picture has a title, what does the title suggest to you? (not applicable)

What facts can you learn about the picture from the artist who created it, art critics, or published materials?

There is one historical fact, known about the artist, that can help in the understanding of this picture. The photographer had a problem with his son-in-law, at the time, that completely disrupted the entire family and caused a great deal of anguish and emotional pain. The marriage required guidance counseling but nevertheless ended in separation and an eventual divorce.

What can you learn from other pictures, made by the same artist, that might help you to better understand this picture?

ON ANALYZING A PICTURE STORY

When you analyze a picture story, it may be helpful to ask the following questions:

(1) What is it about?

(2) What is its justification for being in the magazine?

(3) Who is the story about?

(4) What governed the choice of the lead picture?

(5) Why wasn’t some other picture used in the series?

(6) How do the pictures relate to one another?

(7) What theme holds them together?

(8) Is there an idea such as love or hate?

(9) Does one person appear in all of the pictures?

Exercises

(1) Pick 8 pictures to slam a theatrical company.

(2) Pick 6 pictures to dig the people of another country.

(3) Select pictures with captions and change the verbal context.

(4) Put two or more pictures together to build up the idea of impending doom and then add one to reverse the feeling into a gag that is ironic or satirical.

Make the reversal turn it slaphappy.

(5) Take 3 unrelated pictures and relate them by captions, which apply to all of of the pictures.

Appendix B – The Concepts

Concepts About Light

The presence of light in a picture will have an emotional effect on the viewer. The proper lighting can evoke “the desired emotional response” in the viewer. And, if the artist or photographer understands the emotional qualities of light, he or she will be in a better position to control the response. To the viewer, it becomes very important what kind of light is present. The revealing light of an overcast day will create a different feeling than a directional light, such as sunlight, which casts shadows and evokes warmth. Furthermore, the shape and form of objects can be revealed or destroyed by shadows.

- Directional Light intensifies a shape. It causes an interaction between the light and an object. The emotions of the viewer will react both to the subject and the light.

- Revealing Light presents everything that there is. It makes us conscious of the object itself, and it creates no blocked up shadows or highlights. Revealing Light produces emotional responses which come from the object. It seems to envelop, and may produce a feeling of luminosity or mild oppression.

- Light As A Source creates an awareness of light and the light source itself seems to become a part of the light. This lighting is intense and dramatic.

- Internal Light is a strange type of lighting, where there appears to be "a play of light" within the object itself. The light appears to glow, and it produces a mystical, other-worldliness type of feeling.

- Play Of Light is the name given to the kind of light that lies outside the picture: and plays on objects, with objects, or creates "dancing" shadows.

Concepts About Space

The sense of three-dimensional space, which we can sense in a picture, is an illusion. Nevertheless, the space in a picture affects us emotionally and we respond to it. Space can be primary to the meaning of a picture.

- Limited Space creates the feeling of intimacy or confinement; sometimes a mixture of both. It can suggest: closeness, comfort, intimacy, tightness, imprisonment, or even a feeling of claustrophobia. Sometimes, the feelings of limited space that are experienced come more from other elements present in the picture than from sensations of space.

- Moderately Deep Space or Medium Space creates a feeling of comfort. Space seems to expand somewhat within the picture.

- Deep Space (or Far Space) suggests distance, remoteness, loneliness, wonder, or a nostalgic feeling about space. It can be achieved by: (1) Using both near and far objects within the picture, (2) the use of "The Ground Plane" (seen from near to far), or (3) using "The Inclined Plane" of both ground and sky.

The concepts of Planemetric Space and Recessional Space may be used to explain how movement into space is accomplished. When the planes in a picture are parallel to the picture plane, "the situation" is called Planemetric. When the planes of the image are diagonal to the picture plane, the situation is called Recessional.

Recessional Space is more dynamic and has a feeling of faster movement than Planemetric Space. Recessional Space appears to lead us into the picture; Planemetric Space seems to block us out of the picture.

When we speak about planes in a picture, it is important for us to remember that planes are not always solid. Planes can be "perforated," as is the case with screen doors, fences, and windows. Some planes are implied, for example, a row of trees on the edge of a pond.

There are occasions when the monocular vision of the camera affects the rendering of depth. Space in a picture can be "collapsed or telescoped." When space is telescoped, the various planes within the picture come together even though in reality they are apart.

If there is no way of telling the size of the area shown in a picture, and if a part of the subject is not oriented to the rest of the subject, the subject may appear to "shift in space" from near to far. Parts "pop in and out," or "fluctuate" within space. Fluctuating Space lacks both the intimate feeling of Limited Space and the nostalgia of Deep Space. It produces a kind of strange, shifting, insecure feeling in the viewer.

Concepts About Form

Openness and closedness are feeling states that we encounter daily. Every picture that we see has some kind of relationship to "openness" and closedness. "Open Form" is identified by the incompleteness of all or most of the objects seen – such as heads cut in half or parts of a car. "Closed Form" exhibits all of the objects complete (such as whole heads, whole bodies, or all of a car). It isolates a fragment of reality and evokes the sensation of completeness within the picture.

In Closed Form, the directions are parallel to the edges of a picture. They can be horizontal, vertical, or they may be both horizontal and vertical. Closed Form shows the main subject entirely within the picture frame. It seems to isolate the subject from the world and impose some sort of man-made order upon it. It may be too static. It produces an awareness of order, solidity, and classic stability. There is a feeling that a little world lives an independent existence within the picture frame.

In Open Form, "the major directions within the picture area" are at an angle, not parallel, to the format. The directions are "diagonal," "circular," or "curved." The form is cut by the frame, and not all of the subject is enclosed. The subjects may consist of parts, instead of total entities. Open Form gives the suggestion that something is going on outside or beyond the picture area. There is an emotional implication of cutting. At times, it may be too chaotic. But, it provides an awareness of the romantic, the spontaneous, disorder, and instability.

Concepts About Tone

The tonal distribution within a picture has an emotional effect upon the viewer. Tones may suggest a statement, soften or tone down the statement, or produce a second statement. Contrast, for example, augments the dynamic. Low contrast suggests passivity.

- The Dark Tones seem gloomy, morbid, heavy, or suggest heavy oppression, night, weight, strength and stability, death, and desolation. They may seem mysterious, pessimistic, or evoke somber moods. They can also suggest richness, the unknown, hidden intimacy or gloom.

- The Middle Tones suggest reality, however they are not necessarily uninteresting. They can be neutral, somber, thoughtful or passive.

- Light Tones suggest "another worldly type of feeling." They have an ethereal, floating quality. These tones are exciting, but they are sometimes associated with artificiality. They can convey a degree of optimism or joy. They can also be fresh, bright, frivolous or stark.

Concepts About Value Patterns

The light, middle, and dark value patterns will not always conform to the shape of the objects. They may set up a different pattern and consequently the effect will be different. This does not occur frequently, but when it does occur, "A Hidden Source Of Evocation May Erupt." The "value patterns" that are present in the image have a subtle evocative power. What the value patterns of a picture actually evoke in the spectator may or may not be the same as what the subject evokes.

Concepts About Objects

The size of objects in a picture affects the viewer in still other ways. Large objects, which take up most of the picture area, appear to be monumental, overpowering, and uncomfortable. Medium size objects suggest reality and a feeling of comfort. Small, "spotty" objects make us feel nervousness and suggest busyness.

The creative artist must be concerned with "negative space" or the shape between objects. Sometimes, the shape of the negative space suggests a third object.

Concepts About Balance

If the basic structure works, the photograph will work. Diverse elements can be put into the same area and pulled together, if a photograph balances.

In a photograph, "Tensions Are Built Up By Directions And Weight." The closeness or proximity of objects builds up more tension than when object or lines actually meet. If the directions within a photograph do not balance, "tension" is of primary importance and it must be considered. Tensions, within a photograph, may be resolved by: (1) directions which are opposite and equal, (2) directions which "oppose" one another at right angles, (3) directions that oppose at something other than right angles, (4) directions which meet, and (5) space that "absorbs" weight or direction.

The size, tone, or color of objects may have an affect on their apparent weight. A black mass may feel heavier than a light colored one, but this is not always the case. Large forms seem to have less weight than a collection of little ones.

Balance can be created by both nature and man. At times, it may be purely psychological, such as the feeling that we are able to "escape" to one side within a photograph. But, if it is not "psychological" in nature, it can be classified according to type. There are three primary types of balance: Formal, Asymmetrical (Informal), and Intuitive or Occult Balance.

Intuitive Balance, or Occult Balance, is both subtle and intuitive. It indicates "The Movement Of Action," whereas if the design is formal or symmetrical, it indicates "The Movement Of Standing Still." In Occult Balance, unlike parts are arranged around a balancing point, and they hold the total in equilibrium by their pull.

The Concept Of Essence

There are two concepts that lie at the heart of unique photography. The Concept of Essence is one, the Concept of Experience is the other. Essence refers to that "underlying strata of meaning" – from which all secondary characteristics radiate. Hence, it is "the core," the heart, the central motive – in short the essence of a person, place or event, or gesture – from which the whole person, place or event may be reconstructed.

To reach essence, the photographer cannot work as the painter does. The photographer cannot “pile up” characteristics until an essence is synthesized; he must wait until a face, gesture, or place goes “transparent” – and thereby reveals the essence underneath. This exact instant, when the subject bares its inner core, is a very transitory and fleeting moment. It is never repeated exactly. The expressive function of the camera is to make photographs that reveal the essence of the subject, along with the facts.

It is difficult to photograph essence. Essence photographs are rare because only rarely can the photographer put himself in place of something else – and at the same time be aware of himself or his own existence.

The photographer should be aware of what he projects when he photographs. It is possible to “project” oneself into the subject without being aware of it. Photographing with a “blank mind” leads the photographer into making contact with the subject, but it prevents him from forcing his preconceptions upon it. There are five “bodies” from which we can project” …Our body of associations “this reminds me of a picture that I saw before”; our body of ideas and concepts, “this fits into Type C or Class 2 or Form 6”; our kinesthetic body, “my hand and fingers sympathize”; our emotional body, “out of my emotional repertoire this stirs my feelings of love”; and our intuitive body, which most of us know so little about. We can project from any of these bodies – or parts of them. The only thing that is not a projection is the essence of some thing or someone else.

Essence And The Dominant Image

The dominant image photographer believes, that in the right light, surfaces will reveal the “inner meaning” of the subject. He believes that every image inherently contains one photographic image, which can reveal the facts of the place, person, situation, or object – and when the light is right – some of the emotional feeling. The photographer whose attitude is primarily dominant assumes that every subject has a dominant image.

In making dominant images, the photographer when he must will sacrifice feeling in order to keep the unmistakable likeness – truth to facts. The photographer, with “essence” on his mind, will distort the facts if there is no other way to crystallize essence.

Essence points at the uniqueness of the place, situation, person or thing. Consequently, more often that not, some fractions or some part will “crystallize the whole” by being that part which stands for the whole.

Essence belongs to the subject and not to the photographer. After a period of time, however, the fascination with “objective essences” can turn into introspection. If this happens, the photographer may recognize that there is a kind of “chemical union” of himself with a place, person, situation, or thing.

The Dominant Image and The Essence Image are concerned with “Things For What They Are.” With “The Essence Image,” the photographer tries to work from the intuitive or “sensed reality” of the subject. In both types of images, the attitude of the photographer is to find the wonder and revelation of a subject through the direct experience of “The Thing For What It Is.”

The Concept Of Experience

Experience refers to that part of an event, place, situation, or person that may be shared with others by means of the photograph. Edward Weston evokes the experience of beauty in his photographs, Ansel Adams evokes the experience of goodness, W. Eugene Smith evokes the experience of truth, Alfred Stieglitz evokes the experience of “transcendence,” and Ruth Burnhard evokes the experience of the mystical.

“The Concept Of Experience” is a useful concept when trying to come at the problem of a particular photograph’s relation to a work of art, because it allows a direct approach to the photograph itself. If the photograph evokes the experience of beauty, truth, or goodness or what the viewer associates with “the aesthetic experience,” then the photograph fulfills one of the functions of a work of art.

The Subconscious Mind In Photography

The photographic image can be a record of an “inner state” that the photographer “neither remembers seeing nor experiencing” at the moment of exposure. The photographer can put things into the subconscious and get a visual answer in due time – if he works in a seeing state with a blank and responsive mind, and if something is fed into the subconscious mind through meditation. Sometimes, the relationship between what has been fed into the subconscious can be seen instantly – sometimes only after the print is seen in meditation.

The Unconscious Creative Cycle

The photographer's task is to make emotional feelings come out visually. The process by which this occurs can be called; The Unconscious Creative Cycle. First, an "idea-feeling" becomes isolated and drops to the subconscious from the surface mind. The photographer's mind is thus sensitized and found objects – or objects in the studio – develop into an idea when put together. Next, there is a "visual echo" of the "idea-feeling." The photographer recognizes that something exciting has happened, but he may or may not know the cause. The photograph may be the result of contemplation and previsualization; or it can be created very quickly as a result of the photographer's "recognition" that something of importance has taken place. Finally, the new photograph is contemplated and the "idea-feeling" is identified. The "conscious" and "unconscious" are united by "feeling," which leads to their fusion in a spontaneous public image or photograph.

To understand how The Unconscious Creative Cycle works, we must understand what "the blank mind" is – and how contemplation is used to limber up the subconscious mind. Contemplation can be directed "inward" or "outward" as the individual wishes, and so there are two very distinct types of contemplation – the subjective and the objective.

Subjective Contemplation of an object or a photograph is undertaken for the express purpose of revealing some aspect of the "self" of the viewer. The direction of Subjective Contemplation is inward, because of the viewer's association with the contemplative act.

The aim of Objective Contemplation is the opposite of "self-discovery." It is undertaken when the purposes of Subjective Contemplation have run their course, and its purpose is to establish a rapport with the physical world. Objective Contemplation seeks to uncover the meanings of things in the outside world. It reports facts, it allows us to look at the photograph as a unique object in the world, and it allows the viewer to establish contact with the photographer.

The dominant feature of "the blank mind" is the absence of preconceived ideas. Preconceived ideas serve to obscure the receptivity of the conscious mind. When the state of the mind is "blank," intuition and perception function at their best – because the subconscious will overcome "the surface mind" when the moment of recognition strikes. In this state, one can turn the "seeing" inward or outward at will.

Expressive And Creative Photography

The term “creative” stands for that kind of photograph which communicates what one has to say to another person. The term “expressive” stands for the use of the camera to discover one’s inner self. Since the creative photograph is expected to evoke a predetermined mood in the viewer, the photographer should know what he wishes to communicate so well that he can find the right means and the proper photograph to make another person understand what he is trying to say. The creative photographer looks at everything – to see if it might possibly be the photograph that he is searching for.

The whole creative process of understanding a subject is colored by also trying to see if its “essence” is similar enough to some abstract idea to be a possible subject for that idea. But, this kind of creative photography requires a sensitivity to the unique implications of a subject, then selecting the one which is photogenic at the moment.

There is a second approach to creative photograph – in which the photographer attempts to understand all the possible implications of a subject – and then sees if one implication might be similar enough to the idea in his mind to illustrate it and make it visible.

The first is accomplished by photographing the subject itself in a way that reveals its character; the second, by choosing a subject to photograph, which will illustrate an idea existing only in the mind of the photographer. The first method requires the photographer to understand the subject; the second requires him to recognize what will convey a meaning.

Both of these approaches to creative photography rely upon the capacity of the medium to convey feelings about the subject through another subject. When photography is used in this manner, the physical nature of the subject is immaterial. The photographer must be open-minded to all subjects, and look for a subject capable of communicating his concept to an audience.

Creativeness in photography is found exclusively in The Perceptive-Phase, or the period prior to exposure, rather than in The Execution-Phase of photography. Fortunately, the photographer is conditioned by his medium to automatically recognize the exact moment when a subject is fully revealed.

In The Perceptive-Phase, there are three ways in which the photographer can practice creativeness. The first way is to understand the meaning of the subject – although it is important to understand that what we perceive about the subject colors our understanding about it; the second way is to understand all of the implications of the subject and then use one in order to illustrate an idea; and the third way is to establish a "mutual understanding" between the photographer and the subject, which can develop into a state of mutual creativeness.

While the expressive photograph has significance for the photographer, it may be meaningless – or mean something entirely different to others. The photographer may see something and record it without once considering the feelings of those who may see it. This is the kind of photograph that allows the photographer to explore his own personality, and it is made when you want to photograph in order to contemplate and analyze what a photograph really means to you.

Expressive photography allows the photographer to learn what he has to say. In creative photography, the problem is to make photographs that will have significance and evoke a predetermined emotion in the viewer. Expressive photography shows you what you have to say – and there is a constant alternation between this and creative photography. It is a dual process – studying one's own inner growth, and then creating.

Public And Private Images

An image is public when it is understandable by the general public. The photographer's emotional feelings come through visually because: (1) the subject matter is literal, (2) the subject matter is non-literal but it is rendered with "shared symbols," or (3) titles guide the audience to the desired response.

An image is private when it has a limited audience. If non-literal subject matter is rendered without the use of "shared symbols," or if the audience is not sophisticated enough to respond adequately to the photograph, the emotional feelings of the photographer will not come through visually.

Channeling The Spectator's Associations

The photographer loses control of communication when the spectator is left to his own associations. The only dependable way of working in the private world of other people's associations and mental images is to channel the spectator's association with a title. A photograph may need a title because it does not function as a source of information. It may be meaningful only if the subject is treated as a kind of "peg" to hang symbols upon. At the opposite extreme, the identification of subject matter can be so obvious that a title is necessary to suggest how the picture might be experienced more fully.

The Record Of An Inner State

The “objectivity” of the camera enables the photographer to turn it inward and use it as a means of self-discovery. However, an image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. A meaning or event, occurring in a photograph, may be entirely independent of the photographer. When an urgency is present, it seems to find many mirrors of itself in the visible world. The photograph, which is a record of some “inner state,” can function as a means of self-discovery. It can help the photographer to understand what his “inner state” was at the time the photograph was made. If this kind of photograph is exhibited, the camera can “hold up” a piece of the photographer’s “psyche” for public display.

Mirror Images

The Mirror Image is in the realm of “Things For What Else They Are” or “What Things Are In The Process Of Becoming.” Mirroring starts with the self-portrait. If the photographer changes expression, he brings some “inner change” to the surface of his face for the camera to see. In effect, his facial expression acts as “a mirror” of some aspect of his inner self. Mirroring, however, goes much farther than that. The similarities of any kind, that one feels to be parallel to one’s self, may act as a mirror – at least to the photographer.

Probe Images

The Probe Image is one that causes a viewer to “look” into himself. Unfortunately, because picture audiences find it discomforting to take a searching look at themselves, there is a tendency to dismiss these penetrating photographs as psychologically distressing. The Probe Image seems to have an unpredictable life of its own – some find it to be therapy, and others find it exciting. There is no sure way to plan a photograph so that it will act as a probe.

Dream Images

The Dream Image appears to be a visual message from the psyche to the photographer. The image should be read by the photographer, but it is a personal message – and not really meant for public viewing. One can learn to interpret Dream Images just about as easily as one learns to read a new language, however not all photographs should be read.

Message Images

The Message Image is very similar to the Dream Image in appearance, in the necessity to recognize when a “message” is present, and in the knowledge that is required to read it.

Both Dream and Message Images appear as hard reality. The difference between them is really quite simple. The Message Image comes from a source independent of the photographer’s psyche. The content is new material that the person could never have thought of. The content is objective – not imagined. This is the remarkable part of the Message Image.

The Mirror Images of Things For What Else They Are, and all of the variations, extend beyond sight and insight. Content and transcendence are important but not the manner nor the means which the photographer chooses to employ. Realism may be stretched to the point of abstraction; but some tie with “the world of appearances” must be maintained, or else the camera’s strongest point – its authenticity – will be irretrievably lost.

The Equivalent

The Equivalent established the core of the kind of art photography will be. In this approach, the subject is treated without regard either for its individuality or its essence, or the reaction it causes in the photographer; but it is treated as the medium of expression. The photograph functions as a metaphor, and the camera sees through the world of surfaces to the implications of the subject.

Stieglitz used clouds and people for “Equivalents,” but it makes no difference what subject matter is used. “Equivalence” is not a style. It is a function between the spectator, the photograph, and extending in time perhaps to the person who made it. It can be a mirror of one’s inner self. If a feeling of loneliness is uppermost in the consciousness of the photographer, an old building, a part, a pond of lilies, or even a lamppost will provide the subject matter for the camera. The same subject matter can communicate other feelings as well.

The Process Of Equivalence

It was Stieglitz' response to his subject matter which made "The Equivalence." This special response may be described as an image taken into a person and retained because it is wanted. Once this image is within a person, it is turned into his own private image. This private image will cross a person's mind from time to time, even thought it may not be understood. Because of some human emotion arising out of fear, love, annoyance, anger, joy, or human trust, etc., there is a desire or a compulsion to remember the image. It is held close within the person and it therefore changes him in some way.

An Equivalent evokes a feeling similar to one which already exists in some other event or photograph. It works by means of "the power of suggestion"; and the mind of the spectator must get past the intellectual symbolism of the photograph, because the photograph should evoke a feeling – not an intellectual idea.

A photograph may act as an Equivalent to another photograph in this manner: Photograph A is expressive. It has meaning only for the photographer in that it is a stage of growth. Photograph A1 gives feeling to you but also to someone else, and is derived from self-exploration. If photograph B has the feeling of A1, it is said to be equivalent to photograph A1.

When a photograph functions for a given person as an Equivalent, it is acting as a symbol, or plays the role of a metaphor, for something that is beyond the subject photographed. It is both a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol. (A spontaneous symbol is one that develops automatically to fill the need of the moment.) Equivalence is a two-way reaction between the photograph + the person looking at the photograph – and the person's mental image. It is only in the mental image held that there is any possibility of a metaphorical function occurring.

A photograph functions as an Equivalent in the viewer's psyche, by the mechanisms of "projection" and "empathy." If the viewer is not subject-identification bound, he will respond to the expressive qualities of shapes and forms – on a subconscious level. The effect that seems to be associated with Equivalence may be described in this manner: When both the subject matter and the manner of rendering are transcended, that which seems to be matter becomes what seems to be spirit.

Equivalence revolves around "the remembered image." What we remember is peculiarly our own, because various distortions take place and change "the recall image" – after the original stimulation has gone. These alterations from the original come from the individual himself, and so the response to an Equivalent must remain a private, untranslatable experience, which lies entirely within the individual.

Communication By The Equivalent

Any photograph can function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the viewer realizes that for him, what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself, and if the photograph "mirrors something within him," then his experience is some degree of Equivalence. An Equivalent, tells the viewer in effect, "I had a feeling about something and here is a metaphor of my feeling." The thing that is significant here is that what the photographer had a feeling about was not for the subject he photographed – but for something else. The forms of a cloud may correspond to the photographer's feelings about a certain person and remind him of the person. If the viewer catches in the photograph the same "feeling" which the photographer experienced, and if the viewer's feelings are similar to those of the photographer, then the photographer has aroused a known feeling within him.

The power of the Equivalent, as a vehicle of creative expression, lies in the fact that it can convey and evoke feelings about things, situations, and events, which for one reason or another cannot be photographed. The Equivalent enables the photographer to make use of the forms and shapes of objects for their expressive-evocative qualities. The Equivalent does not express the feeling that the photographer had for the subject of the photograph; but rather it is the expression of a feeling that lies within the man himself. The "plastic material" of the visual world is used for the photographer's expressive purposes.

Objects, or forms, can be photographed to obtain an image with specific suggestive powers. In this way, the viewer can be directed into a specific and known feeling state within himself. Materials possessing an infinite variety of forms – such as clouds, water, or ice – can suggest all sorts of emotions, tactile encounters, and intellectual speculations in the spectator. These reactions are formed and supported by the nature of the material – but they maintain an independent identity, which allows the photographer to choose what he wishes to express.

The Equivalent permits the photographer to emphasize the transforming power of the medium over its recording power, by causing the subject to stand for something else. It is equally strong; and it permits the photographer to express a feeling or emotion – or to photograph a subject that is un-photogenic. At one level, the subject matter of the Equivalent is simply a record. But, at another level it may function to arouse planned sensations and emotions.

Photography Of An Inner State Of Mind

What happens in front of a camera may be called the external event; what happens in the mind of the photographer may be called the internal event. What occurs before the camera, and what takes place in the photographer's mind and eye, affect the meaning of pictures.

True communication requires more than just creating an image in the mind's eye – and then producing it as a print. No matter what this image means to the photographer, it does not have essential value unless it enables the viewer to comprehend "The Realities Of The World, And Of The Spirit."

Things For What They Are And Things For What Else They Are

To understand a picture, one needs to go "out of yourself," "out of your way," to understand the essence of the subject. The subject concept goes beyond that which can be seen; it includes factual information about the object, the essence of the object, and the inner facts as well. If the subject is 3-dimensional but it is rendered as a flat object, the creative artist is "making it do something," and it is becoming something else.

When things are rendered as something else, "transpositions" may be made in form, time, texture, density, meaning, resemblance, suggestion etc. A rock may become a landscape and frost on the windowpane may become a sea wave. This kind of a picture requires considerable observation on the part of the creative artist. We must observe all of the changes made by lighting, shadows, objects, in space etc. The concept is a subjective one. When looking at this kind of a picture, the spectator must ask himself: What does the subject remind me of? How do I feel about it? And, What is it equivalent to?

Through the juxtaposition of one object with another, the connotations of each can be made to change. Although the objects themselves are not visually changed by photographing them together – their implication are. And, "the conflict of connotations" now becomes the impact of the picture. The relationship of objects creates a kind of "third effect," and the concept of Things For What Else They Are is extended to still another dimension.

When viewing pictures, it is important to keep in mind that pictures frequently go beyond the literal rendering of objects, and instead may render an inner state of mind. When this happens, the original subject has less and less bearing on the ultimate meaning of the picture, and the mental image within the viewer becomes increasingly the only possible source of his experience. When the link to the original subject is broken or stretched thin, the viewer is left to his own association. This intangible realm of controlling the viewer's "mental image," has become for many creative artists, a field of communication.

We make mental adjustments and permit "shades of gray" to stand for color, "two dimensions to stand for three," and "picture size to stand for life size"; but in spite of our acceptance of "authenticity" in a life-like painting or photograph, a tree in a picture is not the tree itself. The picture is not reality. When the mind is freed from thinking only in terms of surfaces, textures, form, and substance, we will be able to think of these elements (and the subject matter itself) as symbols, metaphors, and Equivalents that enable us to depict the inner world – or render the invisible visible.

Photographs Function As Symbols

Photographs are symbols of life experiences. We may look at a face and see a deeper truth that lies beneath the surface. This inner image, replaces in our mind, the "mask" that the person presents. Thus, subject matter need not be literal. The camera can reveal the essence of the thing before it – or it can portray universal feelings. A photograph can reveal the perceptions and emotions of its creator in response to a particular environment.

Appendix C – Art & Design Motifs
(Active Analysis By Memory/Association)

Each symbol is a simplification, or "graphic shorthand," of things, which we have seen so frequently in nature that the memory of them is automatically stimulated by the line – and with the memory, comes its habitual emotional association. In order to perform active analysis by Memory/Association, determine the dominant structure of the photograph or painting – then assign its Memory/Association meaning.

Design Motifs	**Meanings**
Horizontals	Repose, Calm, Peace, Finality

If the character of the lines is too lively and nervous, or if the tones are rough and broken, the restfulness of "the motif" will be destroyed. If the line lifts slightly near the center, vigor and tension are felt in it.

Verticals	Immobility, Stability, Dignity Austerity, Majesty

If the proportions are perfect and a sense of great height is given to the vertical forms by their placement and their scale, the vertical symbol becomes the most imperious of all the motifs in the language of design. When the vertical forms come very close to the top of the picture, there is almost invariably a suggestion of coldness and remoteness in the subject.

Rich tones, such as gold, brown, deep red and turquoise, contribute weight to the towering vertical masses and functional ornament of the picture. If austerity or architectural monumentality is predominant in the mind of the artist or photographer, then a colder and more restrained color scheme is requisite to the picture.

Vertical – Horizontal	Eliminates All Sense Of Movement, Expression Of Extreme Stolidity And Stubbornness

If the maximum of solidity and stubbornness is to be conveyed, then there should be rigidly separated contrasts of light and dark, and uncompromising areas of the strong, heavy hues – such as brown, black, earth red and cedar green or slate blue. This is a direct and forthright motif which graceful subtleties of color might weaken.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Pyramid	Imposing Dignity, Alertness
Gothic Arch	Spiritual Aspiration, Contemplation

The vertical lines should be slender and long. Heavy verticals may suggest a crypt or dungeon. Colors are generally grays and whites with delicate drawing in darker colors (such as greens, blues, and browns). The use of over-brilliant prismatic colors seems to defeat the message of the design.

Roman Arch	Weight, Somberness, Solidity Stolidity When It Is Applied To Human Figures
Grief Line	Tragedy, Melancholy

The "Grief Line" is a curved, slowly descending line. The prevalent color scheme is black, blue and blue-green, which is relived by very small areas (or under-tones) of a warm color for decorative interest and to intensify the morbidity of the closely related cold dark tones. If the expression were intended to reach the intensity of a tragedy, it would appear justified to use flashes of the more menacing hues in the black areas such as very hot orange or volcanic red. The dark and cool browns are also melancholy.

Spheres In Profusion	Comfort, Opulence, Luxuriance Richness

The colors are lush and luxuriant rather than weak tints.

Pointed Shapes	Alertness, Keenness, Vivacity, Penetration

The "glitter" of reflected light is an essential part of our image alertness. Lively contrasts of light and dark give the picture a sense of keen activity.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Unsupported Diagonal	Movement, Insecurity

The nature of the movement and its rapidity depend partly upon the inclination of the diagonal and partly upon the picture itself. There are two common devices in the diagonal to express movement, which augment its activity. One is to employ the static vertical, or vertical-horizontal motif as a foil or contrast to the movement. The second is to employ a motif of movement in the opposite direction, which accentuates the sense of speed as when trains or cars pass each other in opposite directions. It may also create "the illusion" of counter-movement. Diagonals are not nearly so effective in the suggestion of movement if they extend to the edge of the design.

If the diagonal reaches from corner to corner, it becomes perfectly static like a cross-brace. Also, if it comes to rest against the side of the rectangle, all suggestion of movement ceases.

"Unsupported Diagonals," used for the suggestion of movement across the wall of a plane, seem to have the greatest dignity and decorative integrity. These diagonals can also be used to suggest movement either forward or backward into space by increasing or diminishing the scale of the figures.

The sense of movement induced by the diagonals is greatly amplified if there are movements of color in the design. The color movement may be in the same direction as the diagonals – or in reverse – in which case the picture becomes even more active. Color movements are generally achieved by "progressions" from subdued areas through passages of increasing intensity – to a point where the hue is at full brilliance.

Partially Supported Diagonals	Powerful Movement

Symbols of speed include arrowheads, comets, rockets, hair blowing in the wind, and horizontal streaks.

Wave Curve	Graceful Energy And Movement Youth

Carried on to still greater energy, and even to violence, the motif may resemble the storm wave – and the emotional reaction is then one of turbulence and unrest. If carried to the extreme, with violent contrasts of light and dark, the storm wave may give us the sensation of an approaching disaster. In any case it loses its symbolism of youth's graceful vigor, to suggest something more violent and disturbing.

Design Motifs	**Meanings**
Sunrise Motif (upward concentric arcs)	Ever Expanding & Infinite Space, The Process Of Growth, Exultation, Depression (if employed downward)

When the arcs are inverted, the picture's mood becomes either heavy or tragic. "Blocky" or dull figures in weary gestures will defeat the motif even if perfectly fitted into the arc pattern. Insofar as color is concerned, the strongest glow should be near the center of the expanding arcs, and the most brilliant color should be at some distance from the central glow.

Conflicting Diagonals	Combat, Conflicts (such as a conflict of passions or ideas), Hostility, Struggle, Agitation, Confusion

Violence of color can be obtained by the juxtaposition of dissonant hues of great brilliance.

Spiral	A Generative Force Or Great Force, Dynamic, Motion, Power, Excitement
Zigzag	Animation, Excitement, Agitation Restlessness

The extremely nervous variant of the "zigzag," which takes the form of a lightning flash, is the most potent expression of a frantic sort of agitation. It is a very disturbing movement because its source is one of the most terrifying of common natural spectacles. It should be reserved for pictures that reflect a shattering sort of human experience.

Effects of light are an important factor in the expression of this motif. Dark, torn edges silhouetted against the light are as effective emotionally as fulminating tongues of flame-like color. Spiral swirls are the most effective foil to the erratic movements of the lines.

Gnarled Tree	A Struggle Against Adverse Conditions, A Search For Paths Of Less Resistance or Greater Nourishment, Obstacles, Writhing, Twisting, Inherent Viability, Vigor

Design Motifs	Meanings
Vibrations	Tensions And Forces That Surround

Vibrations can be symbolized by “shimmering or flickering objects,” rapidly repeated dots or lines, vibrant colors, and through our associations and memories of things that are tense and quivering.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Cascade	Pleasurable, Playful, Swift, Sometimes Powerful

Subjects for the “Cascade Motif” include: light drapery over seated or standing figures, groups of people descending a staircase, or a waterfall.

Design Motifs	Meanings
Vanishing Point Perspective	Finite Or Limited Places, Box-Like Enclosures
Inverted Perspective	An Infinite Universe, An Amplitude Of Space, Avoids Any Sense Of Congestion
Rhythmic Lines	Grace, Charm, Movement
Light Lines	Hope Ambition
Broken Shapes	Instability, Uncertainty
Rectangular Shapes	Stability, Strength, Unity
Circles	Immensity or Vastness, Eternity, Equality, Unity (If only one circle is present), Motion, Deliverance
Ovals	Femininity, Creativeness, Sensuality, Perpetuation, Grace
Informal Subdivision	Activity, Excitement, Elasticity, Progress
Formal Subdivision	Dignity, Strength, Unity, Balance, Formality.

Color Symbolism

Color symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. And, research has shown that most colors have more positive associations with them than negative.

Black

Black is the color of the night, and of “evil.” Black can also be a color of elegance or class. Black can also represent ideas such as power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, unhappiness, depth, style, sadness, remorse, anger, and mourning. Black can also represent a lack of color, the primordial void, and emptiness. Black expresses the depths of the unknown, and encourages the imagination of a different world from that of daylight realities. Used by itself, black can represent bad luck or misfortune.

Black/White

Black and white stands for mourning and cheerless occasions. For example, traditional garb for a funeral is black and white. Black symbolizes the loss, and white the passing onto the heavens.

Blue

Blue may be associated with pure qualities. In addition, it is the color of water and the sea, with all of its symbolism. Blue usually indicates femininity, life, purity, etc., just as water does. Blue can also symbolize peace, calm, stability, security, loyalty, sky, water, cold, technology, and depression.

Brown

Brown represents the ideas of earth, hearth, home, the outdoors, comfort, endurance, simplicity, and comfort.

Gold

Gold is associated with royalty. It represents the color of the heavens.

Green

Green can represent nature, the environment, good luck, youth, vigor, jealousy, envy, and misfortune. It can be regarded as the color of eternal life as seen in evergreens, which never change their color from season to season.

Orange

Orange can represent energy, balance, warmth, enthusiasm, flamboyant, and demanding of attention.

Pink

The color pink can show childish innocence or a characters child-like personality. It can also be used to show a more flirtatious personality. Pink is normally a color associated with girls and femininity. Pink is considered a color of good health and life – we speak of people being “in the pink” or the “freshness” of a newborn babe. Lastly, pink is associated with sexuality and purity. That is, a girl who is a virgin in heart and body. Pink is symbolic of pure love, for example.

Red

Red can symbolize many things ranging from blood, to love, to infatuation. Basically red symbolizes strong emotions, or things of strong emotions rather than intellectual ideas. For example, red can symbolize excitement, energy, speed, strength, danger, passion, and aggression.

Red is the color of blood and fire – and therefore represents life and vitality. It also signifies the color of the sun: a symbol of energy, radiating its vitalizing life-force into human beings. Red is also looked upon as a sensual color, and can be associated with man-s most profound urges and impulses.

Silver/Gray

Silver/Gray symbolizes security, reliability, intelligence, staid, modesty, maturity, conservative, old age, sadness, and boring.

White

White is a sacred and pure color. It’s the color of angels and gods, as the color reflects that which is sacred and pure. It is also the color of doctors, nurses, and others in the health profession, as well as cleanliness. White can also represent reverence, purity, simplicity, humility, youth, winter, snow, good, cold, clinical, and sterile.

Yellow

Yellow can symbolize joy, happiness, optimism, idealism, gold, dishonesty, cowardice, deceit, illness, and hazard.

Lines And The Character Of A Picture

Determine the “character” of the lines in a picture. They help to give the picture its emotional character. Lines may be flowing, nervous, jerky, jagged, tight, free, hard, distinct, clear-cut, decisive, firm, broad, narrow, sketchy, broken, ragged, smooth, rough, sluggish, dynamic, static, vigorous, animated, turbulent, ejaculatory, staccato, practical, dramatic, disappearing, emotional, swirling, writhing, delicate, flexible, naturalistic, or decorative.

A line may be “a symbol of emotion” expressed in rhythmic movement. It is capable of expressing innumerable moods and qualities. It also can express the essence of the subject matter’s personality.

To most people, the straight line suggests rigidity and precision. It is positive, direct, tense, stiff, uncompromising, harsh, hard, and unyielding.

The slightly curved, or undulating line, is loose and flexible. Because of harmonic transition in the change of direction, it has flowing continuity. Its slow, lazy movement is passive, gentle, feminine, aimless, vague, or wandering effect. The more vigorously curved line seems to change direction rapidly. This curve is active and forceful.

Mood Experienced	**Design Elements Commonly Used**
Excitement	Bright Colors (usually warm), Extreme Contrasts, Unbalance, Diagonal And Zigzag Lines
Strength	Dark Colors, Broad Or Heavy Lines, Large Masses, Solidity, Deliberate Impeded Movement Of Rhythm Or Line
Calm	Grays or Neutral Colors, Cool Colors
	Horizontals, Gentle Curves Or Gentle Tonal Gradations, Symmetry
Delicacy	Narrow And Light Lines, Lightness, Thinness, A Floating Easy Movement Of Rhythm Or Line, Small Masses

Although the subject matter of two pictures may be completely dissimilar and unrelated, the pictures may be perceived as similar or may evoke similar feelings in the spectator because of a similarity of design. This fact demonstrates that we may perceive and respond to the design of a picture more than we do to its subject matter or representational content. In representational photography and art, therefore, the elements and principles of design are as important as the subject.

If Several Design Elements Suggest A Particular Memory/Association, Then The Mood Of The Picture Will Be Intensified!

Introduction To The Worksheets

The worksheets will enable you to organize your analysis and to insure that you include all of the important points that should be covered. The complexities of analysis increase noticeably when a number of related pictures are to be analyzed – as is the case with a photographic Sequence or a Montage. With these pictures, an "idea-feeling" may extend throughout several inter-related images.

Here the various images are developed and coordinated with one another so that the "idea-feeling" within the picture can express more complex ideas that can be expressed by a single image that stands alone. If more than one "idea-feeling" happens to be present, the "idea-feelings" will need to be understood both as individual "idea-feelings" and as "idea-feelings" that exist as a part of some larger unified whole. Checklists will enable you to keep the visual images, and what you understand about them, well organized regardless of the complexity and quantity of the photographs involved.

You may copy the Worksheets in Appendix D for any of your analysis needs.

Appendix D
(Worksheet For The Analysis Of A Picture)

(1) What is the overall feeling that you get from the picture?

Does it have human or animal-like shapes or qualities?

(2) What are the implied relationships in the picture?

What do they suggest?

(3) What are the various feelings that you get from the picture/

The lighting makes you feel:

The tonality makes you feel:

The space in the picture makes you feel:

Touch/Tactile Sensations make you feel:

Motion/Kinesthetic Sensations make you feel:

Design/Composition Sensations make you feel:

(4) What do the light, middle tone, and dark areas each suggest?

What do they suggest when viewed together?

(5) Now relax, be still with yourself. Contemplate and meditate on the picture for at least 10 minutes.

(6) List what you see in the picture.

(7) What is the subject of the picture?

(8) What action takes place?

(9) What person or object receives the action?

(10) Describe the setting where the action takes place.

(11) If the picture is realistic or documentary, what reality about the subject does it show?

What facts can you learn about the subject and its relationship to its environment?

(12) If the subject material is not easily identifiable,

The subject seems to suggest:

The action seems to suggest:

The object or person acted upon seems to suggest:

The setting seems to suggest:

(13) Write one or more paragraphs that describe in detail what happens in the picture.

(14) List the symbols and possible metaphors that you see in the picture – and then write down the associations or meanings that these symbols and possible metaphors have for you according to how they are used in the picture.

(15) Take the paragraph(s) that you wrote, describing the picture, and re-write the paragraph(s) using the symbolic meanings of the various symbols and metaphors that are in the picture – wherever it is appropriate to do so.

(16) How do these symbols and/or metaphors influence one another to affect the meaning of the picture?

(17) What do you think the artist or photographer was trying to say?

(18) How did he or she use each visible part of the picture to help say it?

(19) What is the mood of the picture?

(20) How did the artist or photographer establish this mood?

(21) What are the artist's or photographer's ideas and attitudes towards the subject?

(22) What tricks were used to get the artist's or photographer's ideas across?

(23) What alternatives could the artist or photographer have used to express the same idea or feeling?

(24) Does the picture reveal the essence of the subject?

If so, what essential qualities does it show?

(25) Do you feel as though the artist or photographer has projected some part of himself or herself onto the subject?

If so, why?

What kind of influence did the artist or photographer have on the subject?

Do you think the picture was candid or posed? Why?

(26) Does the picture work as an "Equivalent" or "Metaphor"?

If so, what is the idea or feeling that is expressed?

(27) If the picture portrays and inner state of mind, then what state of mind does it portray?

(28) Are your feelings about the picture supported by the form (or design motifs), the content of the picture, and the meaning of the various symbols?

If not, then re-check your interpretation of the picture.
If they are, then you are probably on the right track!

Now, put aside the picture for a reasonable period of time, and then look at the picture again.

(29) Are your feelings about the picture the same as before or are they different?

In what ways have they changed?

(30) What new insights do you have about the picture now that you did not have before?

You may be able to obtain insights from sources outside of yourself that can help to shape your understanding of a picture. Sometime during your analysis of a picture, you should answer the following questions:

- If the picture has a title, what does the title suggest to you?
- Has the artist made any statements about the picture that can help you to better understand it?
- What facts can you learn about the picture from the artist who created it, are critics, or published materials?
- Are there historical facts, known about the artist, that can help you to understand the picture?
- What can you learn from other pictures, made by the same artist, that might help you to better understand this picture?

Appendix E
(Steps In The Creative Photographic Process)

The mental atmosphere, surrounding the photographer,
creates his psychic state of mind.

A stimulus interacts with the photographer's belief or attitude.

A period of meditation may take place in order to put something worthwhile
into the subconscious mind.

A "seed-thought" or "idea-feeling" drops into the photographer's
subconscious mind.

A period of gestation occurs.

Symbols and subject matter give form to the "seed-thought."

An inner excitement takes place in the photographer when the symbols and
subject matter, that the photographer sees, correspond to the "seed-thought."

The photograph is made.
It is a visual metaphor of the "seed-thought."

Archetypal symbols and cultural symbols cause the photograph to evoke
an emotional response in the viewer.
This response gives the photograph meaning.

Archetypal symbols cause a universal response that transcends cultures.
But, cultural symbols limit a viewer's response
unless the viewer is familiar with that culture.

An emotional response, followed by meditation techniques and the use of
intellectual analysis, can lead to understanding.

The use of synchronicity systems can confirm the analysis and can increase
our understanding of a visual image.

What You Should Know About Pictures That No One Ever Told You

Trying to understand pictures can require as little or as much time as you wish. There are countless ways to read a picture and each of them may produce new insights that will help you to understand the picture a little bit better. A picture is like a jigsaw puzzle, each insight that you obtain, can help you to solve another piece of the puzzle. And, that puzzle is made up of many possibilities but only a limited number of probabilities.

Understanding the cultural background of an artist can improve your understanding of a picture. And, if you study the life of the artist or photographer, you will learn a great deal about their creative work. By so doing, you may gain an insight into the mental atmosphere that surrounded the artist at the time. And, perhaps you will understand what drove the artist to create a particular picture or body of work.

One of my favorite methods, for tapping into the subconscious in order to better understand a picture, involves the use of "synchronicity systems." In my book: Understanding Pictures: theories, exercises, and procedures, I describe in detail how to use this procedure with visual images. Synchronicity systems can uncover hidden meanings and relationships in a picture and they can reveal the mental atmosphere that surrounded the artist or photographer at the time a picture was created.

When using these methods, you can ask such questions as: What was the "mental atmosphere" surrounding the photographer when he made this photograph? If I am casting the I Ching, it is helpful to look at the picture at the same time – in order to focus my attention.

If you would like to know more about a picture, than you are able to glean from the photograph itself, this approach can be very useful. Sometimes, it will be the only way to know certain things about a photograph or a photographer. You will be amazed at how much your subconscious mind and intuition can accurately reveal to you. (When I analyzed Minor White's photograph "Easter Sunday" by means of the I Ching, and sent my analysis to him, he replied that my I Ching analysis of his photograph was quite accurate. That analysis revealed the psychic state of Minor White at the time the photograph was made and it revealed the state of his health as well.)

It is important to note that an artist's environment helps to create their mental atmosphere. This mental atmosphere will, in turn, create and influence an "idea-feeling" or "seed-thought." The "idea-feeling" or "seed-thought" will then find its way into the subconscious mind where gestation occurs. A photograph is no more and no less a visible manifestation of the "seed-thought" – made visible by means of visual symbols. If we only understand the feelings that are aroused by a photograph, and nothing more, it is not possible to fully understand the meaning and significance of the image.

Blocks To Understanding

Having a feeling, and photographing what causes that feeling, is no assurance that others will experience a similar feeling in the reading of a photograph. A person can read his own photographs rather deeply, but it is questionable whether one can do so to the photographs of another photographer. Most people will either not read a photograph, or else they will read it as a mirror of themselves. Only a trained critic will be more objective and analyze the photograph for itself. This is done by drawing a tight line between interpretation and what one actually sees in the photograph.

Instant Criticism

Immediate value judgments are the prime factor in preventing involvement with photographs. We must be prepared to postpone judgment of "good," "bad," "like," or "dislike" until later. The actions that these words call up destroy any possibility of extending our perception while working with a picture.

Plain Sense Of The Image

Sometimes, whether or not we experience a photograph depends upon our recognition of the subject photographed. There are literal minded and design ignorant people, design conscious and sympathetic viewers, and non-literal or symbolic minded people – and photographs can range from the literal image, where the subject is unmistakable, to the ambiguous or non-literal image.

Wrong Anticipation and Misreading Facts

If a viewer identifies the original subject of an ambiguous photograph incorrectly, obviously he is off on the wrong track. Even if he can verbalize profusely about the photograph, he will misread it. A lack of life experiences is the main reason that young persons are inclined to misread images, but unfamiliar objects usually need captions to get the viewer off on the right track.

Wrong anticipations have a high frequency among viewers. The person who demands that all photographs be of people will find it impossible to fully experience the landscape. The person who believes that all photographs should be beautiful will be blind to those which are not. Preconceptions, and high standards of perfection, prevent involvement with images that fall below an arbitrary standard.

Memory Jogs

Our involvement with images is based upon associations and past experiences. Frequently, an image will serve as a "memory jog" to form associations that lead the viewer away from the picture – and into his past life. The photographer can predict neither the specific "memory jog" nor its effect on a particular viewer. When the train of associations leads the viewer into the realm of past memories – that have no bearing on the image – both the picture and the photographer are lost.

If the viewer keeps his attention on the image, universal associations will prevail that are common to both the viewer and the photographer. It is only when the viewer attends to the image at hand, that the photographer has a chance to make valid predictions of the viewer's potential experience of the photograph.

Compulsive Reactions

A person in a state of identification with something can twist almost any image into a mirror of his or her own inner state. The process is somewhat like the train of associations set off by the "memory jog" – except that it leads into the present. As with the "memory jog," the photographer can never hope to predict experience when this interference occurs.

Stock Answers

Clichés, or stock answers, reveal a poor imagination on the part of the viewer and sidetrack involvement with the image. The most original image in the world can elicit stock answers from a person who has not been able to make contact with the photograph.

Verbalization

Verbalizing is a form of talking that is a substitute for any contact with the image. It is a means of escape from life. It indicates that the viewer is avoiding contact with certain forms of life as they are represented in a photograph. Verbalization is monotonous, full of clichés, and unrelated to the content of a photograph. It is closely related to stock answers.

When our feelings and reactions are expressed photographically, we need not express them by verbalizing about our photographs. They are in the print for all to read. The perception and awareness of the viewer should allow him to understand the creative intentions of the photographer. If the viewer has visual awareness, he will be able to perceive meaning from the photograph without verbalization on the part of the photographer.

Doctrinal Adhesions

A person's stand in relation to religion, politics, schools of art, or fields of photography, etc., can be a strong barrier to involvement with images.

Sentimentality

Personal and emotional tie-ups are generally unpredictable. Inhibitions not only affect a person's life, they affect his acceptance of images. In an apparently random way, they determine the viewer's acceptance or rejection of certain kinds of photographs. Inhibitions in life are carried over to looking at images in photography, and they have a similar effect on response as prejudices and preconceptions.

Feeling Of Inadequacy

Feelings of inadequacy occur when there is a feeling that the photo image in question has a "right " answer, or a specific meaning, and the person is afraid to make a mistake. There may be a variety of causes, including: a real inability to verbalize, a determination to keep the visual experience free of "verbal entanglements," or simply a failure to get involved and a reluctance to admit that "no reaction" has taken place.

Avoidance Of The Issue When Under Pressure

This commonly occurs in a classroom, workshop, or interview situation, when a person is expected to externalize his experience. Avoidance takes place when the viewer must say something, but there is little or no involvement with the image. The viewer may: describe the subject, describe and criticize the composition, and describe or question the technique. Technical questions are a standard reaction. Sometimes, the viewer wants to find out how the image was made in order to later go out and do the same. The description may mask angers aroused because the viewer is forced to observe his failure to make contact with the image – or the viewer may describe the obvious because he is afraid of making mistakes. Saying, "I like it" without elaboration is another form of avoidance.

Emotional Blocks Through Analysis

It is important to guard against emotional blocks that can occur when intellectual analysis takes place. Responses may be emotional as well as intellectual. It is possible for an image to hold something for the viewer intellectually and be an emotional blank.

The Identification Of Subject Matter

The identification of subject matter is the lowest common denominator of a response to a photograph. A meaningful experience with a photograph requires some degree of imagination on the viewer's part – if there is to be an interaction between the photograph and the viewer. At best, a photograph is a step towards a mental image. And, it is by means of the mental image evoked in another person that photography is able to communicate.

Multivalence

Multivalence is a term that refers to the possibility of more than one meaning (or interpretation) to the same response. For example, "I like it" can mean many things. The person may be inarticulate, the photograph may not offend him in any way – or he may really like it.

When the response is multivalent, the photographer encounters the problem of what to do with the response. Right at the beginning, he is faced with the problem of how well an individual verbalizes his response.

The Person Who Doesn't Want To Do Self-Searching

This person either has no imagination or is deliberately blinding himself to visual experiences that might disturb his basic security. The full range of photographic possibilities of "communication-evocation" is a closed world to him.

Oblivious Response

Some persons react as if they had never seen the picture they are looking at. These viewers would probably give substantially the same response to any photograph. Any photograph would mirror back to them whatever mild compulsion was uppermost at the time.

Rejection

If the photograph is independent of the original subject, the viewer may reject it because he cannot identify the original subject or he may willingly engage the photograph because it is an event in its own right. Photographs, in which the subject is hard to identify, separate viewers into two groups: those who are offended at being denied “subject identification” and reject the photograph – and a second group of sophisticated viewers who will accept the photograph for its own sake.

The literal, or “subject-recognizable photograph,” separates an audience into classes along different lines. The literal photograph separates the people oriented from the nature lovers. The viewer, who is a purist, will tend to prefer the representational photograph. The literal photograph acts as a kind of “bridge” from the viewer back to the original subject – the non-literal acts more as a direct source of experience.

Responses can be classified as negative, neutral, and pertinent. A negative or neutral response may turn into a pertinent one even while a person is talking about a photograph. If there is a lapse of time between seeing the photograph and the attempt to verbalize, a change of response is common. The response change of pertinent to neutral or negative is less likely to happen.

Negative responses prevent the viewer from understanding any statement a photograph might possibly communicate – or any feeling it might evoke. However, this must be taken as a general statement because some people will appear to take a delight in photographs that they hate. No one will remember pictures to which they are indifferent.

No Comment

This response often indicates a lack of sensitivity, at least to the photograph in question. The same response to a number of photographs may indicate either a lack of sensitivity to visual matters or an inarticulate but visually minded individual. This type of person may be able to express himself with gestures or pencil and paper drawings. Sometimes a drawing, together with a few words, will reveal the viewer’s thoughts or a state of feeling.

I Like It – I Don’t Like It

This indicates an incapacity to communicate verbally, or it can indicate a lack of sensitivity on the part of the individual. This response may or may not be true, because the viewer may feel that he has to make some kind of response and so he takes the easiest way out. If he tells you he likes it, he may think your photograph is better – or he may be trying to make you happy.

If a person rejects a photograph, he closes his mind to any further traffic with that image. If the photographer can discover the reasons, they usually provide the photographer with information. Sometimes the photographer is not at fault. The reasons may have little or no connection with the photograph.

I Just Love It

This reaction usually indicates that the image has triggered the individual into remembering some former state of euphoria. The phrase is often followed by a glowing account of the remembered event.

The Changers

Persons who would have taken it differently – or indicate that it should be cropped differently – rarely see the photograph as a statement by another person. “The Changer” either substitutes some problem of his own, or finds his own photograph within the picture. He seldom responds to the picture itself.

This is not really a response but a return to the original subject. The viewer is not responding to what the photograph “says,” but he is using wrong material for what he himself would like to say. The important question is this: Is the viewer changing the photograph in order to make it into his own picture – or is he changing it to clarify what the photographer is trying to say? This is a fascinating response to watch because of what “the Changer” reveals about himself.

The Bluffers

A person may feel compelled to say something about a given photograph because he has agreed beforehand to do so. Stock answers, such as “life and death” or “old and new” may appear out of desperation or when a person is indifferent to a particular photograph.

If a person is a habitual bluffer, this response may be interesting because it takes considerable intelligence to talk one’s way through a photograph in a convincing manner. Sometimes, the bluffer’s response may be pertinent to the photographer because the bluffer may inadvertently cause a moment of understanding for the photographer. On other occasions, as the bluffer talks, “what comes off the top of his head” may lead him toward understanding something about the photograph.

It’s Been Done Before

A person who has had a considerable experience with photographs may reject a photograph that is less successful than others that he is reminded of, or because it reminds him of a class of photographs that he has long wearied of or otherwise rejected. If the attitude denies the viewer entry into the photograph, it is “a negative response; if the discussion points out the correspondence to previous photographs, it may be “a neutral response.” This response ordinarily comes from persons having a considerable experience with photographs in a particular field – such as advertising or news – or from an individual having wide historical knowledge of photographs.

Neutral Responses

If a photographer consistently inspires a neutral response, then he should seriously consider some other form of self-expression – or find another group of persons for his audience. The neutral response indicates that communication is not taking place.

Literal Description

In this response, the individual either describes a photograph part by part or stops with the identification of objects. For such persons, identification usually ends the experience of a photograph. The person who counts objects in a photograph frequently fails to observe the relationships. Once a photograph has been “pigeonholed” in this manner, the door to further exploration of the photograph is closed. Literal description indicates that communication has not taken place between a photographer and his audience. The viewer, who has this response to a photograph, has only seen what he can or wants to see.

Technical Analysis

Technical analysis, like “literal description,” indicates a lack of communication between a photographer and his audience. Technical discussion avoids the necessity of “making contact” with what the photograph reports or evokes. Bluffers sometimes resort to this.

Description Of Graphic Design

This response generally comes from persons who have had art and design training, and it can be an avoidance of the pertinent meanings of a photograph as much as can a literal or technical description. On the other hand, some photographs offer little more than graphic design to an audience. In such cases, a discussion of design and composition is pertinent and appropriate. To some persons, pure form is as meaningful and emotional as significant form is to others. Responses in this category are always useful to the photographer because they are informational.

The Historical Viewpoint

Seeing the photograph in question against other photographs may or may not be a neutral response. It is neutral if comparisons are made on an intellectual level to the exclusion of the emotional level or if the comparisons are a way of avoiding the humanistic statement of the photograph in question.

Pertinent Responses

Profound and effective involvements with photographs lead to pertinent responses. This kind of response goes beyond rejection and superficial visual conversations with photographs. The viewer who makes “a pertinent response” finds some kind of symbol of his own personal experience in the photograph and relates himself to it. “The Pertinent Response” pertains to both the photograph and the viewer. It can be on the physical, emotional, associational, or intellectual level. It can also be on more than one level.

The “tangibles,” such as tone values, composition, design relationships and the various photographic concepts are relevant. They are the only safe and secure ground upon which verbalizing can take place. But, because people also respond to the intangible qualities of a photograph, they are also a part of the pertinent response.

The actual nature, of most pertinent responses, escapes either verbalization or visualizing by gesture or sketches. Therefore, about all the photographer can hope for, are clues to the fact that the individual is experiencing the photograph.

Clues To Image Involvement

There are various clues which indicate that the viewer is "meaningfully involved" with the image.

(1) Tactile sensations may be derived from the photograph.

(2) The image is "converted" into signs and symbols.

(3) The viewer "anthropomorphizes" and projects faces or human characteristics to the image.

(4) Design, concepts, or composition are related to the subject and to feelings. The viewer starts "relating" – "this design does so and so and makes me feel this way."

(5) Subjects are invented when the photograph is ambiguous and the subject cannot be identified.

(6) The photograph serves as a "mirror" of the viewer's self or the viewer may make personal projections (kinesthetic or physical). When this happens, something is going on but it can be irrelevant as far as the photograph is concerned. But, projection into the photographer's experience – and/or personality – means a pretty objective response.

(7) A photograph may be put in relation to some other experience or feeling. This may indicate a thorough comprehension of the picture or it may indicate a superficial level of understanding.

Sense Of Presence

When the spectator relates the subject of a photograph to its surroundings, he is beginning to have a response with the picture. He is beginning to get involved with it. Responses require a curiosity, on the part of the spectator, as to what is behind a picture – a curiosity as to: when, where, and how it was taken – or a discussion of the mood of the place, event, or the individual. These curiosities, on the part of the spectator, indicate an involvement with the photograph and therefore some response.

The spectator may feel that he is “in the presence” of some place, person, event, or mystery. Sometimes, “the feeling of presence” takes the form of speculating on how the photographer felt while he was “in the presence” of a place or an event. In other cases, tactile sensations are aroused by the photograph, and the response can be related to the tactile imagery that the photograph evokes. For example, the textures seen in a photograph of bark or sand may arouse the appropriate sensations in the hands of the viewer.

Deduction From Visible Clues

Two broad classes of photographs can be set up: those pictures that transform the subject – and those which represent recognizable subject matter. Some “factual” photographs ask questions, which the viewer can answer from the information provided in the photograph. When this happens, the viewer may attempt to sort out the implications of the photographic facts. The viewer has to “engage” the photograph in order to locate an answer, and so an interchange takes place between the viewer and the photographic illusion of subjects and their relationships. The viewer of the photograph may wonder: Who lived in this house? Or, What kind of person lives behind this face?

Recognition Of An Immediate Symbolism

The identification of standard symbols, when they occur in a photograph, indicates a relevant and pertinent response. A photograph may depend on a long established symbol, but sometimes it will function as a new statement of a universal feeling.

Conversion Into Signs And Symbols

Conversion into signs and symbols bring involvement – not with the object but with the symbol of the object. If the symbol is not merely a cliché, there can be real involvement. Otherwise, these tend to be standardized responses.

Anthropomorphizing

The projection of human characteristics to an image can be irrelevant. However, one must engage a photograph long enough to do it. Anthropomorphizing indicates that a response is happening.

Anthropomorphizing occurs when we see faces in rocks or parking meters, and when people project such human qualities as courage, anger, love, hope, or spirit, etc. The anthropomorphized forms rarely match the feeling evoked by the rest of the picture. Generally, they bear a relation to the viewer's own personality. This response is common when the subject of a photograph is ambiguous or cannot be identified.

The Photograph As A Source Of Experience

In the extreme case, where the original subject has been completely transformed, the viewer has to invent his own subject for it – or else be able to respond to pure form for its own sake. The viewer may anthropomorphize, thereby making kinesthetic and physical projections into the photograph; respond to the photograph as though it were a memory trigger for immediate associations; use the photograph as a mirror of the self; or use the photograph to project into the photographer's experience and/or personality. These responses indicate that something is going on, but they can be irrelevant as far as the photograph is concerned. They can also be thorough and objective responses.

Exploration Of The Mirror Nature Of Photographs

Any response is a projection of the inner self to some degree. The viewer, who has the curiosity to explore "the mirror nature" of photographs, can use the photograph to see a manifestation of his own inner workings. The photographer must have a considerable knowledge of both himself and other people before he will be able to distinguish between an abnormal psychological response, and a response, which reveals something pertinent about the viewer and the photograph.

Responses As If The Photograph Were An Equivalent

When the viewer becomes aware that the image directs his attention outwardly into the world, he may experience a relationship of himself to the universe. The photographer may not be able to see even a clue to the experience.

Intellectual Responses

An intellectual response means that there is an intellectual process functioning in the mind of the viewer. If you look at a photograph and are made instantly aware of the composition, size, and shape relationships, the photograph may in effect be suggesting that this is the way you should look at it. When this is so, one could attempt to respond to it on an intellectual level.

Evaluation Of Responses

To communicate feelings with photography, it is necessary to first know something about the photograph. A photograph must be understood before it can be put in relation to some other experience or feeling. Without understanding, we cannot intelligently use photographs in various contexts and for various purposes. How can a photograph function as an Equivalent for a particular poem – or as an advertisement for a product – if the “idea-feeling” is not the same?

If the photographer’s response indicates that certain feelings are present, others may be able to respond similarly. It is important to understand “how a photograph makes us feel” in order to understand how it will affect others, and it is important to know something about the individual who is going to see a particular photograph. A knowledgeable photographer should know the scope of what he can do with a photograph and when to use a particular type of photograph. Non-objective photographs, for example, can set off free associations that the spectator may want to repress because they are painful for one reason or another. Thus, a photograph can lead the audience into areas that they don’t want to see.

The Study Of One’s Own Photographs

If the photographer studies his own photograph, until he has seen everything present, he is in a better position to predict the possible responses of other people. The potentials within the photograph include: facts, relationships, “What The Photograph Reminds You Of” and the whole range of where the image reaches you. That is to say, whether the response is through the intellect, the emotions, or physical sensations.

The photographer can isolate additional features of the photograph for study with drawn overlays. The two dimensional surface of any photograph has certain large space divisions which are caused by the distribution of light and dark tones. These “main divisions” can be drawn on a piece of transparent paper laid over the photograph. The overlay should then be taken off and studied independently of the photograph. Separate overlays can be made for still other patterns, as for example, the pattern formed by the blacks and dark values treated together, the separate patterns that are created by isolating the middle gray values or the light values, or the textural distribution. (This procedure is equally valuable to any viewer who is trying to understand a photograph. And, it can be incorporated into an Active Analysis of a photograph.)

The photographer (or viewer of a photograph), in studying and responding to these isolated aspects of the photograph, should allow the drawn overlays to touch his suggestibility, his sensations, his intellect, and his emotions, singly or all together. At times, the responses will be the same as those, which were aroused by the photograph as a whole – sometimes entirely different feelings will appear.

Collation Of The Photographer's Experiences

By the study of sketches and overlays, the photographer (or viewer) can come up with a large number of associative, emotional, kinesthetic, and intellectual responses to himself. And, no matter how strange, irrelevant, or alike the responses may be; they should be converted into words or sketches. New responses are then added to the list made from the photograph itself.

This kind of extension is useful, because no matter how "way out" a response may seem to the photographer, it is probable that some viewer will have the same response to the photograph. By arming himself with a long list of possible responses, the photographer is in a position to say that he can predict the responses of a group of people – although not of individual people.

Prediction Of Visual Experience

The photographer can both control and predict the visual experience of the viewer insofar as he can evoke "known feeling states" in other people. He can create a photograph that appeals predominantly to the emotional, intellectual, or the kinesthetic-tactile side of the audience; but he has no assurance that other people will be able to experience his photograph fully. Even if the photograph corresponds to an "idea-feeling" that the viewer of the photograph has experienced, certain blocks may occur which prevent any understanding of the image.

Nevertheless, advanced creativity in photography lies in affecting changes in the inner state of the viewer's mind by means of the photographic image. These changes are predictable to the extent that: the photographer comprehends the photograph fully, understands his own response, and understands the nature of the picture audience.

Evaluation Of Photographs

A photograph creates a mental image within a person, which in turn leads to change (or metamorphosis). Evaluation is the act of deciding whether a photographic image depletes or nourishes in the process of producing this change. If the photograph "nourishes," it is good. If it "depletes" or takes away, it is bad.

Nourishing photographs are always exciting and moving. They produce a change of psychological state towards power, floating, warmth, love, or euphoria. Depleting photographs create such overwhelmingly negative reactions as: fear, anger, annoyance, conflict, pride, or vanity.

A good photograph evokes responses rather than reactions within the viewer. It is a photograph, which makes appropriate use of the image, and nourishes rather than depletes. The photographer who is capable of creating this kind of an image is able to respond to the world around him and able to make an audience respond. He must bear responsibility to himself, to his medium, and to his audience. Likewise, an audience that is a good or creative one must bear responsibility to itself, to the medium, and to the photographer. It should make an effort to respond to a photograph rather than to react.

Last Words

With your interest in understanding a visual image, you have started on a journey that can last a lifetime. How far you travel down this path will depend on many things – but it will mostly depend on how far you wish to go. In my own case, I started on this journey when I was a young child. I stood before a painting by Picasso and I felt frustrated – frustrated because I was unable to understand what it was that I was looking at. The frustration that I felt led me to begin a lifetime of searching for ways to better understand a picture. For me, that frustration nearly became an obsession. I began to collect as many books and magazine articles that I could find pertaining to the subject. In the late 1950's, I studied visual communication and how to read pictures with Ralph Hattersley and Minor White at the Rochester Institute of Technology. And, it was here that Charlie Arnold taught me the principles of design. After graduation, I kept in touch with my "mentors" for the remainder of their lives.

The language of vision is perhaps the most powerful language that there is. It is every bit as important as the verbal language. Learning the language of vision will contribute a great deal to your life because we are surrounded by visual images. If you decide that you wish to follow this path, I would welcome you to join me and I would welcome your companionship.

Exercises

Exercise For The Passive Method

Select a photograph or an object which you like. Try to be super-aware of the process. Place the photograph or object in a good light and be seated squarely and comfortably in front of it. Direct all of your energy toward the eyes and perception. Until this moment, the eyes should remain closed.

Preliminary Contact – As you open your eyes, you can expect to see that the object has apparently changed in some way. What happens does not make very much difference. The important clue is that some kind of change occurs. You will see it occur in the object or photograph, although obviously it does not change. Hence, the change is in yourself, meaning that some degree of "heightened awareness" is present.

Write Up – After performing the exercise, turn away from the image. From memory, sub-vocally talk the various experiences undergone during the process of relaxation, anticipation, and contact. When the internal talk is done, write out the recalled experience in detail without looking at the image again. Give most of the attention to the process. What does relaxing feel like? What are the sensations as anticipation is directed towards the eyes? What is the feeling that lets you know that you are in a state of "heightened awareness"? Describe in detail whatever seemed like a preliminary contact. Sometimes, it is rewarding to refer back to the image after the report is done.

Repeat this exercise with several kinds of subjects, including more photographs. Always stop within a two-minute time limit. Write up each experience before starting a new one. Be sure to leave plenty of time between contacts. Come to the exercise as fresh as possible each time.

Summary Of Steps To Aid Memory

(1) Preparation – Relaxation
(2) Anticipation
(3) Eyes Open
(4) Preliminary Contact
(5) Write – From Memory

Exercise #2 – Sustained Contact And Interruption

Select a fairly large object, or a photograph of one, with strong textures, clearly defined edges, obviously hard or soft surfaces, or any combination of these features.

Prepare yourself carefully and prepare contact. When you make contact, keep your eyes moving around – back and forth – over the object or photograph.

To sustain a state of "heightened awareness," invite your hands into the act. This can be done easily. Encourage one hand or the other to explore some edge, or surface texture, whichever you wish.

To sustain contact, let the eyes lead your hand around the object, through it, over, under, between. Move the eyes slowly; otherwise the hand will seem to lose its empathetic contact.

After several minutes, when you think that your hands, or some other part of your body, have sampled the textures, surfaces, or edges, bring the sensations to a slow halt. Quietly turn away from the object. Remember the experience from start to finish, in a tactile way at first, then visually, and last externalize with words. Write out the experience from memory. So doing will make the report less than a replica of the inner experience, but will help to keep the experience visual. Keep the vocalizing and writing something to be done afterwards from memory.

If there are interruptions, proceed again. If there are annoying distractions, concentrate harder. If you should lose contact, start over. Even a very slight degree of tactile sensation in the hand is significant.

Sooner or later, you will be able to sustain the inter-connections between sight and touch. After you have found your life richer because of this awareness, begin to explore other connections such as "Sight And Sound," "Sight And Taste," "Sight And Smell," "Sight And Insight." Some of these empathetic connections may arise of their own accord.

Summary

(1) Preparation And Contact
(2) Sense With Hand But Do Not Touch
(3) Sense With Other Hand
(4) Slow Halt
(5) Remember Tactile, Visual, Verbal Awareness
(6) Write – Up From Memory

Exercise #3 – Turning Off

Conscious effort is not always required to either start or terminate a period of contact. Things, which fascinate us, can induce a state of "seeing" in spite of ourselves. There are definite steps for making the coming out of "heightened awareness a positive willful act.

(1) Take a last impression.
(2) Forget the image.
(3) Consciously let the body return to its familiar sense of weight.
(4) Allow the body to start to move in its habitual fashion.
(5) To forget the image, close your eyes or look elsewhere.

Specifically practice the exercise by making contact with something you have chosen to work with. Turn off the "seeing state" emphatically according to the steps given above. Rest a moment and then repeat this turning on and off process two or three times. Then, make a deliberate halt – even though you may feel that you have not been very deeply involved with the subject. The point of the exercise is an act of will. Verbalize your own experience before writing out your observations.

Summary

(1) Preparation And Contact
(2) Last Impression
(3) Forget Image
(4) Body Returns To Normal
(5) Repeat From Step #1 Several Times
(6) Verbalize The Experience
(7) Write – Up From Memory

On The Value Of Exercises

In Eugene Herrigel's book, **Zen and the Art of Archery**, Herrigel describes how he learned archery from a Japanese Zen Master. At first, there were lessons on how to breathe and how to hold the bow but there was no target. For many months, while the Zen master's students learned how to release the arrow effortlessly, there was no target. A target was put up only after the process was learned. The analogy can be made to hold in photography.

Learning the process is aided immensely, if the early exercises are done without regard for the so-called success of the picture! In fact, looking for pictures is generally a good way of missing the opportunities for pictures. The search for photographs blocks us from seeing the livingness of the "subject-object."

Exercise #4 – Subject Essence

Select a simple object with a simple background for this exercise. An old object would make an excellent choice because old objects generally have personality or character.

Meditate on what the subject's "essence" or essential character is. Then, photograph the subject using a digital camera if possible. Maintain this "seeing state" while you photograph the subject. Look at the photograph carefully and see if it has transformed the subject or if it shows the subject accurately.

First, write down what you perceived as you photographed the subject. And then, write down what you feel the photograph evokes in you. Are the feelings produced by the subject and the photograph the same or are they different? If they are different, why do you feel that this change took place?

What you selected to photograph will affect this entire exercise. You will be better able to observe the process, involved in this exercise, if you work with a subject that interests you mildly rather than a dramatic one that leaves you "gasping for breath" – or one that you dislike. At this stage, strong emotions will overwhelm your powers to observe. Unless the subject that you work with is only of mild interest, it will not be possible for you to observe it very well since you will become lost in the process.

It is important to hold contact with the subject, before, during, and after exposure with extraordinary attention. Memorize the sense, the feeling, the thoughts, and your intuition of the subject-object scene so well that seeing the photograph will help bring you back to this same place in yourself.

In this exercise, write down the sense and feeling, knowledge, and intuition of the subject. Use whatever words you can muster – spontaneous poetry will serve best. Later, this kind of private vocalizing can be a trigger, for use while printing, to carry over these feelings into the print – so that the picture audience can experience these feelings later.

When a photographer makes a print, he should try to relive the experience that was uppermost at the time of exposure. Heightened awareness and recall will help you to produce prints that truly satisfy the remembered experience.

If you read one of your photographs, and it does not evoke the same feeling that you experienced when the photograph was made – or, if it does not seem to evoke “The Essential Nature Of The Subject” – it may be because you “projected” something onto the scene.

This is one of the greatest sources of disappointment in photography. The subject-object was not really understood; instead it served as a target that triggered purely personal association. These associations or reminders will be so strong that the photographer literally sees the subject wrong.

Sketches

You have been writing reports, from memory, of your various experiences with objects and photographs. The same kind of reports can be done with sketches. You will know what your sketches stand for. It is only when working with other people, that a few words with a sketch will clarify your meaning.

How Much Of A Visual Experience Should Be Sketched

Literal renderings take too long – the visual note rarely requires more than a minute or two. The spontaneous reminder (or sketch) frees you of fussy detail, and hence sketching may free you of some of your inhibitions. Watch and see if such freedom happens in yourself. Also, visually oriented people welcome a substitution of sketches for words – when recalling or describing a visual experience.

Four Exercises

The significant problem, central to this group of exercises, is an awareness of the differentiation between “I” and “It.” What do we project of ourselves onto the subject? How does this differ from the essential qualities of it? What qualities do you find peculiar to the object, scene, or subject matter of the photograph? And, can we learn to let the object, scene, or photograph project its qualities on us? The task of differentiating “I” from “It” can be approached much more easily with sketches than with camera.

The Imitation Sketch

Make contact and experience some subject-object – in this case preferably not an image. Turn off contact, and without looking at the object from memory. Sketch the experience. Sketch what you saw. Try not to “vocalize” as you sketch. Let your impulse, which gives form to your experience; come from your body or heart – if possible. Notice whether your sketch is literal or metaphorical.

The Self Sketch

This sketch deals with “projections” and “personality.” Select some subject or photograph (other than one of your own). Enjoy the “seeing” of it. At the end, instead of writing, sketch all the important events that happened to you. Try not to “sub-vocalize” as you sketch. Avoid representative renderings if possible. Sketch only your projections of yourself onto the object.

We all project something of ourselves, on everything, all the time. We see what we want to see, and usually at the expense of the person, object, or place. This exercise is intended to help us see what it is that we project.

The problem in this exercise is to keep from a literal or imitation sketch. Keep in mind that what you project onto the object only rarely resembles the “eyeball” or camera eye version of the thing. This exercise aims to help you understand, that what you project is a property of yourself and does not belong to the object. Write up your observations and discoveries.

Essence Sketch

Return to the same object for this exercise as for the Self-Sketch. Re-experience the object in “A State Of Heightened Awareness.” If this proves distressing, select a new object and make both a “Self” and an “Essence” sketch of it. The point of this exercise is to somehow reach the inner reality of the object that lives or hides beneath the surface. Aim to reach the essence that properly belongs to the object – not some part of yourself.

The point of the Essence Sketch is to manifest an inner, more fundamental form; the objective (though intangible) uniqueness of the object. This should be repeated several times with other subjects. For example, select a few related objects or a fairly complex picture and explore, in contact, the relationships within the image.

Coreform Sketch

The idea of coreform is a frank recognition that in any interchange between humans, or between a human being and a non-human subject, there is a blend and an interweaving of forces and resistances. The literal minded person sees only one half of the reality and so must push himself to see and acknowledge the other half – the essence both in himself and the object.

Again, use the same object as for the Self-Sketch. Or, if for some reason that is impossible, find a new object or photograph – but not one that you made. Make a Self-Sketch and an Essence Sketch before attempting the Coreform Sketch.

As usual, “make contact” – and if possible make the sketches from memory. A Coreform Sketch should be done without hesitation from the heart or viscera, and in a few large strokes. As you write up the experience, give extraordinary attention to the possible meaning of coreform, its potentials and implications.

Summary Of The Four Exercises

Imitation Sketch: Work with any object or photograph in contact, from memory, sketch what you saw.

Self-Sketch: Work “in resonance” with an object or with someone else’s photograph. From memory, sketch your projections onto the object. The drawing is not likely to be representational of the object.

Essence Sketch: Work “in resonance” with the same object or photograph used in the Self-Sketch. From memory, sketch the inner being.

Coreform Sketch: Work “in resonance” with the same item used in the Self-Sketch. From memory, sketch in a few strokes your vision of a coreform.

Active Contact And Review In Reverse
Expanded Seeing Exercise

Select a photograph that seems to offer you room to walk, move in, swim, fly or float in – such as a street, interior, garden, or space. Once contact is made, empathetically involve not only your hands but also other regions of your body – if appropriate. Let correspondences grow throughout your whole body, if that seems the thing to do, in any way that happens. Let things grow and occur in your emotions seemingly of their own accord. Let the body itself decide what to experience. Let the mind be active if that seems appropriate. Function as a total human being. Refrain from anticipating that anything can or will happen.

If at any time you notice a tendency to drift out of contact, or an urge to deliberate, “turn off” at once, and after a moment or two turn on again. When you are fully ready to terminate the experience, take a last impression and turn off consciously. Look away, turn around or otherwise keep the picture out of sight during recall.

After you disengage yourself from direct experience of the image or object, enter, so to speak, “a recall phase.” Gather your forces again to visually and empathetically recall it in reverse of the chronological order in which the experience took place. Start with the last impression and proceed backwards to the first impression.

Recall the experience as if running a film backwards. Or, think of walking up a street, turning around, and walking back to the starting point. The view will probably be different. When you write up the return trip, notice whether you proceeded backward in a straight line as reversing a film, or "leap-frogged" back.

Include, in the write-up, your observations on the differences between a linear progression in time forwards and the progression backwards. What is the difference between a forward reliving in recall and a reversed re-experiencing of the trip? Finally, write out your observation about the concept of recall as a working state.

Passive Contact Exercise

Passive contact, with an image, is at least as valuable as active contact, perhaps more so. Work "in contact" with an image and sustain the awareness simply by "Listening In Utter Silence And Stillness For The Image To Speak." This is a special form of listening that is directly connected to seeing. It is felt by some to be a "Listening With The Eyes." so, keep out the usual sounds and "Maintain A Space Of Silence." Be patient, when the image speaks, it will do so in your own language. Passivity – letting it happen – is different than actively forcing contact. It is being a mirror with a memory. The passive approach, at certain times will be the only way to reach the meaning of an image.

Write briefly your observation on the concept of working in a passive state of heightened awareness. What does this kind of experience do for you?

Total Analysis

To experience and understand an image, you should bring to bear all that you have become conscious of – since starting to apply heightened awareness to photography.

Be exhaustive – give special attention to what you project and what you mirror. Many questions should arise. You can expect some answers to be found in the photograph itself, but the answers to others can be found only in yourself. Some of the questions rose out of yourself, not out of the photograph, will be irrelevant and should be squelched.

Some Of The Questions To Be Considered When Experiencing A Photograph

(1) Was the photographer totally present when he made the exposure?
(2) What is his presence like in the picture if he is present at all?
(3) What is the tactile event of this picture for you?
(4) How does your mind deal with the composition?
(5) How does the craftsman think about it?
(6) What vision does the photographer have?
(7) What associations are aroused of other personal events?
(8) When does it stand historically?

These questions should be met and understood in a state of "heightened awareness" – either with the image directly, or from memory and recall. There is something new to seek and find – and it is the presence of the photographer in the picture. Can you envision the maker in the photograph? A photograph may be the result of an urgency, which when present in the photographer, finds many ways to mirror itself in the visual world. Such themes, once sensed, can be materialized and completed in a short time. As usual, write out the experience and your conclusions regarding the process.

Total Experience And Total Analysis Exercise

Select a photograph where the design is appropriate, and one which you like. Experience it totally. Work with it in a state of concentration and work with it further in recall. Bring to these working periods every bit of background information you can muster. Recall what you experienced while taking it. Think about how design, technique, graphics, subject, and visual functions relate to meaning.

Tabulate in key words, or phrases, your entire experience with the photograph both during and after recall. Determine for yourself what the visual functions add to the meaning of the photograph. Look at the photograph again to analyze and write about it. Let the writing itself add to your understanding of the image.

Now, stretch your imagination and make all possible connections between the various relationships within the image. Using a large sketchpad sheet, tabulate all the information. Notice how you get to the same comprehension from various entry points.

Next, make some sketches; preferably separate overlays on transparent paper. Make sketches of the dark areas, the middle gray areas, and the light areas. Outline each area pattern and shade it in lightly so that the shape is clear. Study each overlay as if it were an independent visual experience.
Ask yourself what these sketches remind you of. What mental associations are triggered within you by the form of the outlined areas? Tabulate this in words and phrases for each separate overlay as a separate experience. When that is done, look back to the photograph and try to see whether or not you can see in the photograph what has been spotlighted in the sketch. You may or may not, but in any case tabulate everything.

The objective here is to know so much about the photograph – that nothing people say about it will be new to you. Still, you may be surprised.

Verbal Association Exercise

A photograph is displayed for the usual length of time. Afterwards, no words but sketches of responses are attempted. When a single line, a couple of lines, or a whole scramble is done quickly – such as in a matter of seconds – excitements start. Once started, things may naturally open up. Compare the sketches. Some will obviously relate, but others will be obscure. A feeling of pleasure will accompany the successful ones.

Words are added to the obscure sketches, in an attempt to clarify the connection to the photograph. Next, words are added to all of the sketches in order to start the mind off in new directions. This exercise will help the viewer make additional discoveries about the connections of the visual to contactful talk.

Multiple Images

When images are placed side by side, our minds are affected in various ways. Because of our constant "projection," we very readily see images change as other images are brought beside them – and then replaced with still another image. So the study of visual literacy is to become aware of the effect that images have upon us – whether they are single images, images in sequence, or images in a story or layout. Notice how the images affect your actions, reactions, and responses.

Some photographers want to be able to make a visual statement with two or more images that when seen together make a statement that neither image can make alone. An interesting transference of ownership occurs in creative picture editing. The statement that emerges from a new juxtaposition of images belongs to the person who selects and juxtaposes or edits the images.

An analogy can be made to literature here. Individual photographs are words, small groups of photographs are paragraphs or chapters, the “Sequence” is the novel or epic poem; and the experience of images in sequence is a form of reading pictures. Some photographs are nouns or things, verbs (or actions), adjectives, adverbs -- and even punctuation. Some images are periods – others are explanation points.

While the analogy to words only suggests something partial, the comparison to reading Chinese characters (ideographs) hits the mark since the ideographs are “multivalent” and require intuition to connect the meanings. So far as the photograph is multivalent, or holds many meanings, intuition is required to discover the right meaning in the context of other images. Intuition is required to put images into context with each other.

Exercise With A Sequence

With either photographs or reproductions, put together a “Sequence” to make a creative visual statement. Write down what the statement is. Change the statement deliberately by changing the images. Once again, write down what the statement is. Compare the statements with those of other people to see if they obtained a similar response to the images. Discuss why the images produced the responses that they did.

Effect Of Images On Images Exercise

Find a clipping or a photograph, preferably of a face that has no distinct emotional cast such as an obvious smile, for example. Place other illustrations beside it, one at a time, and observe what happens to the face in this primary image or noun photograph. Does the expression change? Does the modifying photograph satisfy or explain what the person is looking at? Or, does the modifying photograph seem to cause a change of expression without observable reason? When you have found a modifier that causes an apparent change, set that one aside. Go through the clippings again – to find other modifiers that cause a different change in the “noun” photograph. Perhaps you will be able to find three or four or a half dozen photographs which affect the first one in a slight but noticeable way. If it seems that nothing happens to the original photograph, pick another. When changes do occur, they do so whether the graphic connections are weak, strong, or missing. Try this exercise with other types of images, especially so-called abstract forms.

Effect Of Words On Images Exercise

Find a clipping or photograph for the prime objective (noun). Write words or phrases on separate slips of paper. Almost any words thought up at random will do – let your imagination go free. Words that are descriptive sometimes work, but sometimes they do not work well. Think up words, phrases, whole sentences thoughtlessly. Lay the picture on a table. Place slips of paper – beside or under the picture one at a time. You can anticipate, that now and then a combination will appear, that unexpectedly connects with a jolt. Both contribute to a statement that neither can make alone. In both of these image modifying exercises, watch for that moment in yourself when the prime image changes. It is a remarkable moment.

A Method For Putting Together A Sequence

One useful method of putting together a Sequence is to isolate the opening photograph and the terminal photograph – and then fill in between. In a way, locating this first and last photograph sets a question. Filling in between is the answer to that question.

Another method, is to gather up all of the photographs that seem to be related to something. Pull out those about which you have absolutely no question as belonging to the potential Sequence. Arrange those into a left to right reading order. If you have been fortunate, this small group of maybe half a dozen will constitute the essence of the Sequence – the essential framework or skeleton. Next, begin to add connectives – put some meat on the bones. During the additive period, encourage phrases to develop. When the structure of the Sequence unfolds, you may realize that certain pictures are missing – you do not have them in your collection of photographs even though you look. So, you find and make the photographs to fit precisely in some gap in this growing Sequence.

The creative, or psychological structure of a Sequence (coreform) may be experienced as a total entity – and all at once – even though the Sequence may not be completed for many months. Once the subjective “coreform” is grasped, one can work quite objectively to complete and polish the Sequence – in order to make it understandable to an audience.

If you find that a Sequence develops out of material, which you already have, it will probably be necessary to reprint the pictures and remount. This will give a unification of the mount sizes, but more important it will give a graphic and visual connective in terms of print contrast. This can only be acquired by printing the Sequence afresh – beginning with photo number one and progressing to the end.

When printing a Sequence, each negative will be influenced by the juxtaposition of images. More than likely, each print will be quite different in contrast, size, and cropping from what is "right" for it alone.

To keep a contact print of each negative one a file card, allows manipulation of the file cards and facilitates the forming of sequences. To make a preliminary working set of mounted pictures – to size, cropping, and print contrast – allows plans to develop for further refinements.

The meaning of each individual image will come to be less than the meaning of the Sequence. Each photograph then contributes in relation to its place in the series. Each has a fitting place for building up to a climax. Generally, a Sequence falls into "phrases." Each phrase has its internal structure and each phrase builds to the ultimate climax and overall meaning.

In forming a Sequence, the bare bones of the structure should be obvious to you – but invisible to anyone else – unless that person studies the Sequence to see how it has been structured.

Building A Sequence From Scratch

A photographic Sequence can be built from scratch. Photographs are made at random – out of some sense of compulsion. The story is found afterwards. Or, plan as carefully as possible and then go to work. If tension builds up because some new marvelous material, which may even be better, makes a shambles of the plan – let yourself go with the material as it is given to you. Treat the plan as setting the question and the material you find as answering that question. The answer may be devious and unknown until you see it.

A visual connection can be made when there is a shape relationship between two images. Images have effects upon one another and thereby take on a different meaning than when they stand alone. Images, which stand alone, do not cause us to make connections. When images are seen together, they take on connections. When we make these connections, it is as though we take the meaning of each and blend them in some way. How we make that blend is generally quite personal. The subject matter of a Sequence is not what is visibly rendered. Meaning is derived from the implications of design and the associations caused by the symbols.

There are various ways in which images can be made to relate to one another. Look for similar forms – a line of one subject in a picture can appear to extend into another subject in another picture. Rounded forms and harmonizing colors might relate between two pictures. There might be a long white line and whitish colors in two images. The textural sizes of things can also hold images together.

There might be a verbal connection that might apply to both images, for example, the harvest of wheat and ocean harvest. These verbal connections are very useful.

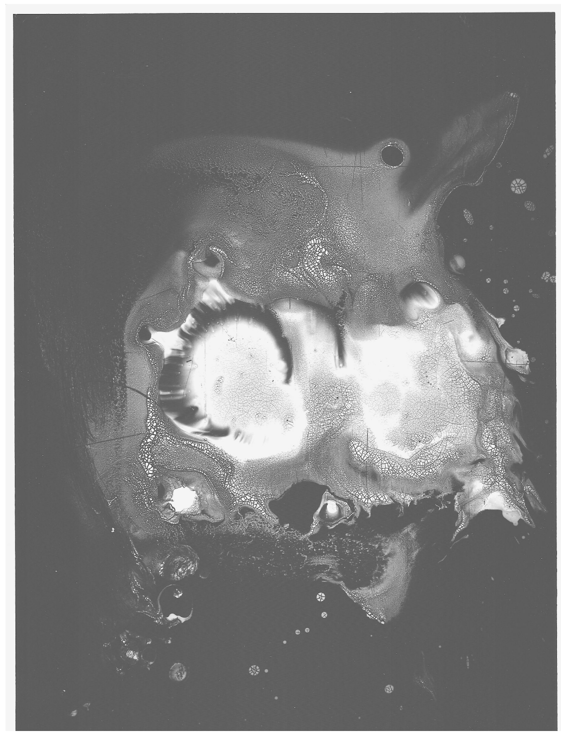
Realism may be stretched but it should not be broken. Abstractions must not leave the world of appearances for to do so is to break the camera's strongest point – its authenticity.

Visual Into Movement Exercise

Convert a slide or photograph into movement with hands or body that would describe how you feel or how you sense the image. Do not try to make imitation movements.

We can communicate to other people through movement. This can be done on the back of someone's hands to denote what we feel with movements. Photography can communicate non-verbally and through the tactile sense of touch and contact communication.

Express in a tactile way your feeling or sensation from these images. Draw shapes with your hand or "beat out" some kind of a rhythm. Then, tap it out on the back of someone in front of you until they experience your feeling or sensation. Finally, tell someone what you experienced.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

This photograph, which resembles an alien life form in the cosmos, is in reality an expression of the photographer's unconscious desire to explore new creative directions in his work. It is an example of: "Things For What Else They Are."

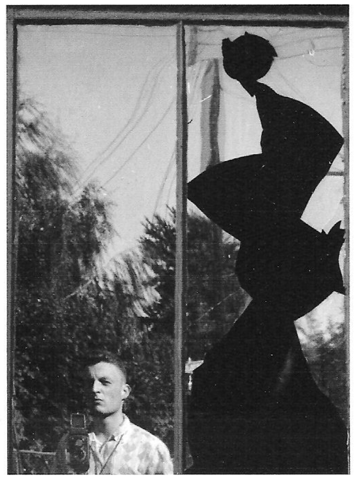


Example of a "Pictorial" photograph



Breakthrough To Joy

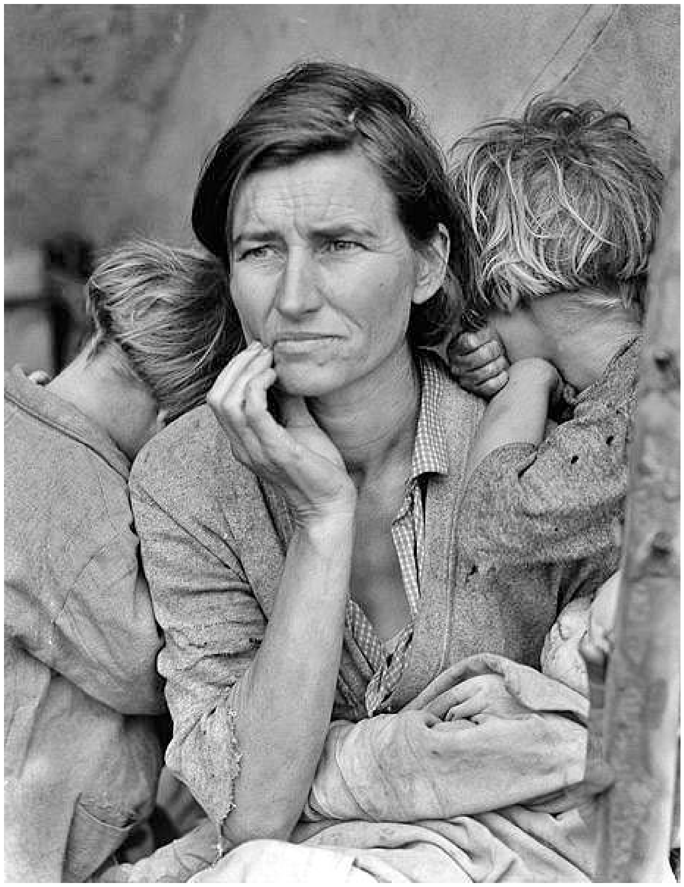
This photograph reveals the essential nature (or essence) of the subject. The title serves to show the feelings that the photograph evoked within me. It uses the connotation of words to reinforce those feelings.



This photograph is a self-portrait. What psychological suggestions do the elements surrounding the subject suggest to you? What clues might they provide about this person?



This documentary photograph shows the subject in her surroundings. What do the various objects in the picture tell you about this person? If a caption accompanied the picture, it could tell us whom or what we are looking at – as well as when or where the picture was taken.



Photograph by Dorothea Lange titled: "Migrant Mother"
Courtesy U.S. Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division

In the 1930's, the Farm Security Division employed several photographers to document the effects of the Great Depression on the population of America. This was one of many photographs created by that endeavor.

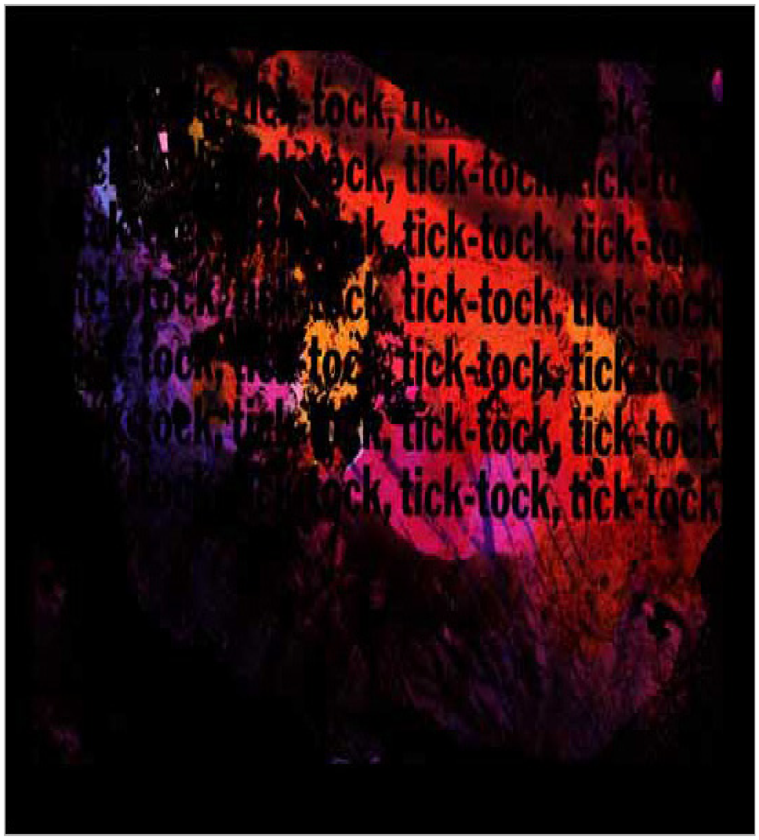
The caption of the photograph read: "Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children, Age thirty-two, Nipomo, California."

We can feel the worry and concern of the subject in this photograph because of her facial expression, the placement of her hand, and the compositional arrangement of her and her children.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

What does this photograph remind you of? Since this non-literal picture lacks a title, the viewer must rely upon personal associations to gain insight as to what the picture might express. Then, these associations must be verified by the design elements, the various concepts, and the possible meanings of the various symbols in the picture. Does it help you to know that it is part of the photographer's "Landscapes Of Outer Space" series and that the photograph's title is: Shaula-X. Now, where do your associations lead you?



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Words can influence the associations that we derive from a picture. Sometimes, a title may be used – at other times words can be used as “additive” captions within the photograph itself.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

Psych-Head – Self Portrait

The title of the photograph leads you to believe that the picture expresses something about the psyche of the photographer. If the picture did not have a title, your associations could take you in any direction.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

If you have difficulty understanding what an abstract picture expresses, you might try “Topsy-Turvy Looking.” By turning an abstract picture “upside down,” or on its side, it is possible to coax additional associations out of it. Ask yourself: what does the picture seem to suggest if viewed in this way? Is it similar to or different than what the image seems to suggest when it is viewed correctly?
In what way or ways does the picture seem to change when it is looked at in this way?



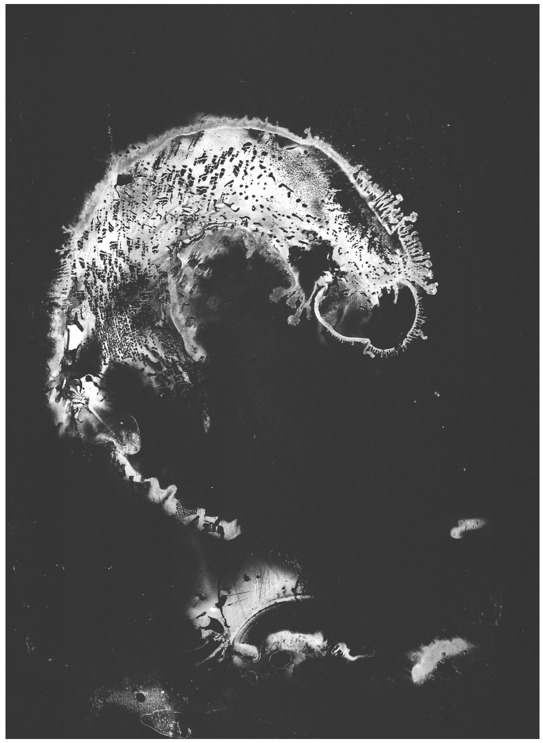
Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

In this photograph, two creatures that resemble tortoises have something unknown pressing upon them from above. The shells of the creatures may symbolize limitation. The substance that is pressing down upon them from above could symbolize stagnation. The dark environment, may symbolize depression. The tortoise can be a symbol of longevity or fecundity. And, the tortoise might be a metaphorical symbol for man. Water can be a symbol of the subconscious mind.

Could the photographer be attempting to say: When we allow ourselves to become creatures, bound by our limitations, that depression and gloom may take hold of our subconscious mind?

We have determined what the important symbols are, how they relate to other symbols in the photograph, their context within the picture, and what actions or feelings they evoke from the other subjects.

This method of working with symbols is called Symbol Amplification and it is a useful way to approach pictures in order to better understand them.



Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

This photograph is from the series: Landscapes Of Outer Space. It's title is: Arcturusv-ii. Using Symbol Amplification, What associations does this picture evoke within you? What does the picture remind you of?

Determine what the important symbols are, how they relate to other symbols in the photograph, their context within the picture, and what actions or feelings they evoke.



Still Life – Light Awakening

Sometimes a “contrived photograph” develops over a period of time. But, at other times, it can be constructed quite rapidly. I felt an “inner excitement” when I observed the “light as a source” in the studio – and I could not work quickly enough to put the various objects together in order to make this still life.



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

“From the series ***The Peace Warriors of 2003***, produced as a reaction to the frustration I felt about the war in Iraq. The series began when I saw a figurative image evolve as I was working on an abstraction in my studio. It ‘spoke’ to me as a subconscious visual expression of my growing frustration with my attempts to reconcile my disturbancce over my country’s invasion of Iraq. This led to a several month exploration of my feelings through the making of the seriess which led to the book, ***The Peace Warriors of 2003***, published in 2004 by Nazraeli Press.”



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

Door and Stairs - Marblehead 1958
"Doors are closed, but the right moment opens them
if you climb the stairs."

This photograph was made soon after the photographer's move to Boston -
"I climbed the unknown stairs and opened the doors - they were full of wonder
and mystery."



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

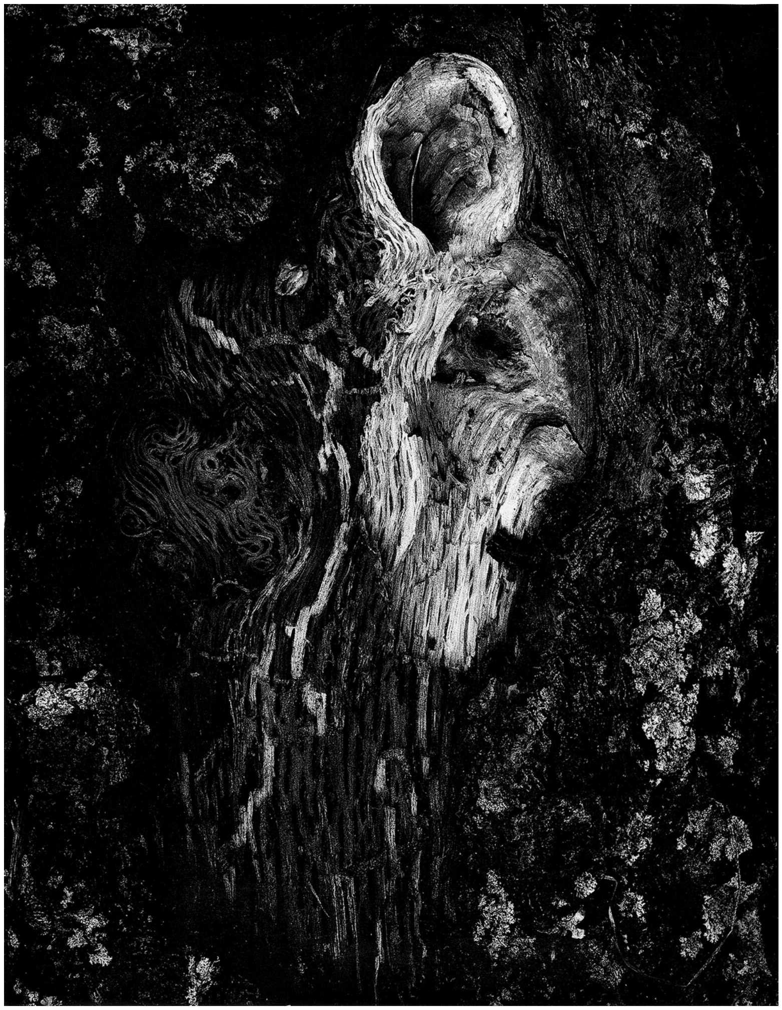
Peeling Paint - Interlochen 1958

"The mysterious contrasting of emotion (light and dark) of a swelling of sound (light and dark) from musicians - this was made while I was the photographer at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan."



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

"This is one of several prints in a sequence which with text carries my deep love of trains – being in them and around them send me into a meditative state of calm and openness. (The Locomotive Sequence is part of my artist book 'Interaction: Verbal/Visual' which was published in facsimile by Nazraeli Press a couple of years ago)." The photograph was made in Rochester, New York just before the photographer's move to Boston.



Photograph by Carl Chiarenza

Hooded Tree Spirit - Ipswich 1960

"All the illusions and allusions of the spirits of the forest come to you when you open yourself to them. (Made soon after my move to Boston - making contact with the unknowns of New England)."

About The Author

Stuart Oring, the author, studied photography under Minor White, Charles Arnold and Ralph Hattersley at the Rochester Institute of Technology – where, in 1959, he earned a B.F.A. degree in Photography Illustration. In 1970, he received an M.A. degree in Communication from American University. His work at the University culminated in the thesis: A Comparative Investigation of Similarities and Differences in the Aesthetic Theories of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White. A Considerable amount of material from that research has been utilized in this publication.

Since 1969, the author has been studying how Synchronicity Systems, such as the Chinese I Ching, can be used as effective tools in the analysis of photographs. These methods can provide insights into the psychic state of the photographer at the time a photograph was made. Thus, traditional methods of looking at pictures can be expanded with creative new approaches in order to provide the viewer with a greater understanding as to what a picture might express.

Because of the significance of his work, in the field of visual communication, the author's biographical information has been included in such publications as:

- Who's Who in the World. 1995-
- Who's Who in America. 1996-
- Who's Who in the East. 1993-
- Men of Achievement. 1994-
- Cambridge Who's Who. 2008-
- The Dictionary of International Biography. 1994-

Artificial Intelligence & Photography
Appendix 2

In this Appendix I would like to describe two methods for using Artificial Image Generation for purposeful visual communication. One method is to use symbols that have relevant meaning for what you are trying to communicate. In this method, you can use a symbol dictionary to help you arrive at the meaning of a particular symbol. In the second method, you can select objects for your Artificial Intelligence photograph synchronistically, analyze the meaning of the symbols after the photograph has been created, and arrive at a decision as to what the photograph might communicate after the photograph has been interpreted.

The first method allows more control over the image and what the viewer's associations may be. The second method may or may not convey the exact and intended associations to the viewer—but still make a very good photographic image. This approach may be more useful for fine art photography while the first method may be more effective for visual communication.

Some photographs need a title in order to guide the viewer's associations. But, there are many photographs that do not have titles because the photographer wants the viewer to use his or her own associations when looking at a photograph. The use of a title may be particularly important for the first method where it is necessary to help "control" what the viewer's associations may be.

In photography, there are times when synchronicity appears to play an important role in the creation of an image. A seed thought may drop down into the subconscious mind of the photographer and when a scene somehow reflects that seed thought, the photographer’s intuition responds, there is an intuitive “excitement” and the photograph is made. This seed thought appears to consist of some idea, emotional feeling or mental atmosphere that surrounds the photographer at a particular time.

In the second method of using Artificial Intelligence in order to create a photograph, we can use synchronicity deliberately. First of all, a strong idea-feeling or mental atmosphere must exist. For example, perhaps there is a strong need for love in your life.

Or, perhaps you are very much interested in the inter-connectivity of things in the universe. The second step is to browse through random pictures and look for one that catches your attention because of shapes, forms, design, or objects in it. Look for some kind of an intuitive response that catches your interest. Once you find an image that causes a strong response in you, take note of the main objects in the photograph. If there is a pear shaped object and an arrow form in the photograph, then you might use the Artificial Intelligence Generator to create an image with those objects. Finally, Analyze the photograph and interpret the symbolic meaning of the objects in the photograph and see whether or not they relate to an idea-feeling or mental atmosphere that you have been concerned with.

Some symbolic meanings of the objects may apply to the idea-feelings that you had while others will not. Select out the ones that do have a relationship to your idea-feeling. Do this for every symbol in the photograph.

I would now like to show you a photograph that resulted when I was very much concerned and feeling the need for strong love in my life and when I was also interested in the inter-connectiveness of all things in the universe. The found image contained a pear shape image as well as an arrow form in the photograph. The following image is what Artificial Intelligence created when I asked it to create an image with a pear and an arrow in the photograph. The pear can symbolize love and the arrow can symbolize spiritual illumination and inter-connectiveness.



Cosmic Pear and Arrow